

WHY WE DO DUMB STUFF...

Gossip, road-rage, catcalling at sporting events, and flinching at unexpected movements.

Humans were wandering around in groups as far back as 1.5 million years ago. Throughout this existence, hunter-gatherers had to collaborate with each other, developing language and subsequently focusing on shared motivations, around food, shelter and procreation. After thousands of millennia, these shared motivations have become “hardwired” elements of what societies honor, and how the individuals within those societies behave in order to thrive.

Societies function because its members all agree to, and respect the way, certain motives drive us all. Here is the list of the 7 motives or perhaps we can call them, the subsystems of the brain:

- **Self-Protection** – Protecting oneself from dangerous humans/others
- **Disease Avoidance** – Avoid people and places that carry disease.
- **Affiliation** – Cooperation based on the pooling of risks and resources
- **Status** – Wanting respect and avoiding the loss of respect.
- **Mate Acquisition** – Acquisition of a romantic/sexual partner
- **Mate Retention** – Partner is loyal to me, and we have common goals for our nuclear family.
- **Kin Care** – sharing resources with those most closely linked to me genetically.

It makes sense that these motivations would be paramount to human interaction, but they have become so ingrained in our minds that they serve as short term instincts. While we don't hibernate or go into a rutting season, our core motivators make decisions for us without much if any conscious thought.

Road-rage



Road-rage is as irrational a behavior as one could create. No one gets up in the morning determined to get into a screaming match/death race with a total stranger. Even so, hundreds of crashes, fistfights, vandalisms and attempted murders spring from the simple fact that someone in a car, cut someone else off, failed to signal, ran a yellow light or just honked their horn. Road rage can be traced back to 3 of 7 elements of motivation for all humans: Status, Self-Protection and Kin Care. No thought required, just a near instant level of fury towards someone who has impugned your status, put a family member at risk or caused a near accident.

Gossip



As described in our recent interview on the WBBM Noon Business Hour, gossip, is rooted in the need to acquire, retain, or avoid losing, status. Gossip is further useful in creating affiliation or collecting data on what is valued by the group in order to gain status.

Both road-rage and gossip are commonly more toxic and harmful to social systems than they are useful. We devolve into them because they are core tenets of human social systems, and we do not often consider them at a conscious level until they go wrong.



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why haven't you?





Social media has created an opportunity for people to seek affiliation, status and self-protection in unique bubbles of like-minded people. This hive mind approach to issues allows for one to rationalize a position or reaction, rather than think about it. Humans don't choose to think if it can be avoided, particularly in what we might perceive to be an "every day" event or part of a routine.



We can choose to align with a group belief without ever considering the practical or social impact of our position. We can blame parts of our humanity for the less desirable outcomes of a government or a committee, but this solves nothing. Solutions do not come from blaming a person, or a group. The act of blaming automatically triggers the need in the blamed to defend their status; seek affiliation with others, and to protect their kin.



Knowing how humans work ought to be a core element of working in Human Resources. Since much of the job is in service to a company trying to make and sell something in a capitalist environment, the value of understanding how humans work is commonly overwhelmed by the need to increase productivity, maximize profits and create shareholder value.



None of these priorities fit neatly into the 7 motivations, save for status. Since they are seldom considered in daily life, the motivations have a disproportionate impact on our lives...to our detriment.

I'm including a link to a paper from the National Library of Medicine. It is a global study of 42 countries, measured in two waves, with 17 of those countries represented in both waves.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9380674/>

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Pragmatic Thinking
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