

# **PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES OF VIOLENCE**

Lecture 3

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## **Brainstorming activity**

### **See the following incident and comment**

“On October 24, 2009, a 15-year-old girl was gang-raped outside of her high school homecoming dance while a group of other teenagers watched but did nothing to stop the assault”

As you think, what would be the internal characteristics of perpetrators?

If you were a member of the second group (those who watched), what would be your response/reaction?

# Four Roots of Evil

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- Baumeister proposes that violence is utilized in four ways:
  - (1) as a means to an end (instrumentalism) – for immediate gratification
  - (2) in response to threatened egotism- self is at risk
  - (3) in a misguided effort to do what is right- “do good” “the ends justify the means”
  - (4) as a means for achieving sadistic pleasure



# What do psychologists do?

- Psychologists examine the internal characteristics of perpetrators excluding situational factors (socioeconomic)
- Common questions they ask
  - what are the internal characteristics of the perpetrator
  - What are their immediate circumstances
  - What types of violence committed

# Psychological Theories of violence

Psychological theories of violence can be categorized into two

## 1 The theories relating to human nature

- Psychobiological theory
- Evolutionary theory
- Classic psychoanalytic theory

## 2 The theories relating to a damaged psyche, present a set of interrelated concepts

- self-regulation
- Attachment
- Shame
- self-concept/self-esteem
- cognitive-behavioural processing





# HUMAN NATURE THEORIES OF VIOLENCE

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## Common concerns

- Violence as an innate characteristic
- Commit violence because Instinctual or biological drives
- The process of human development and environmental circumstances mitigate the growth of aggression and the inhibitory functions that can prevent violence.

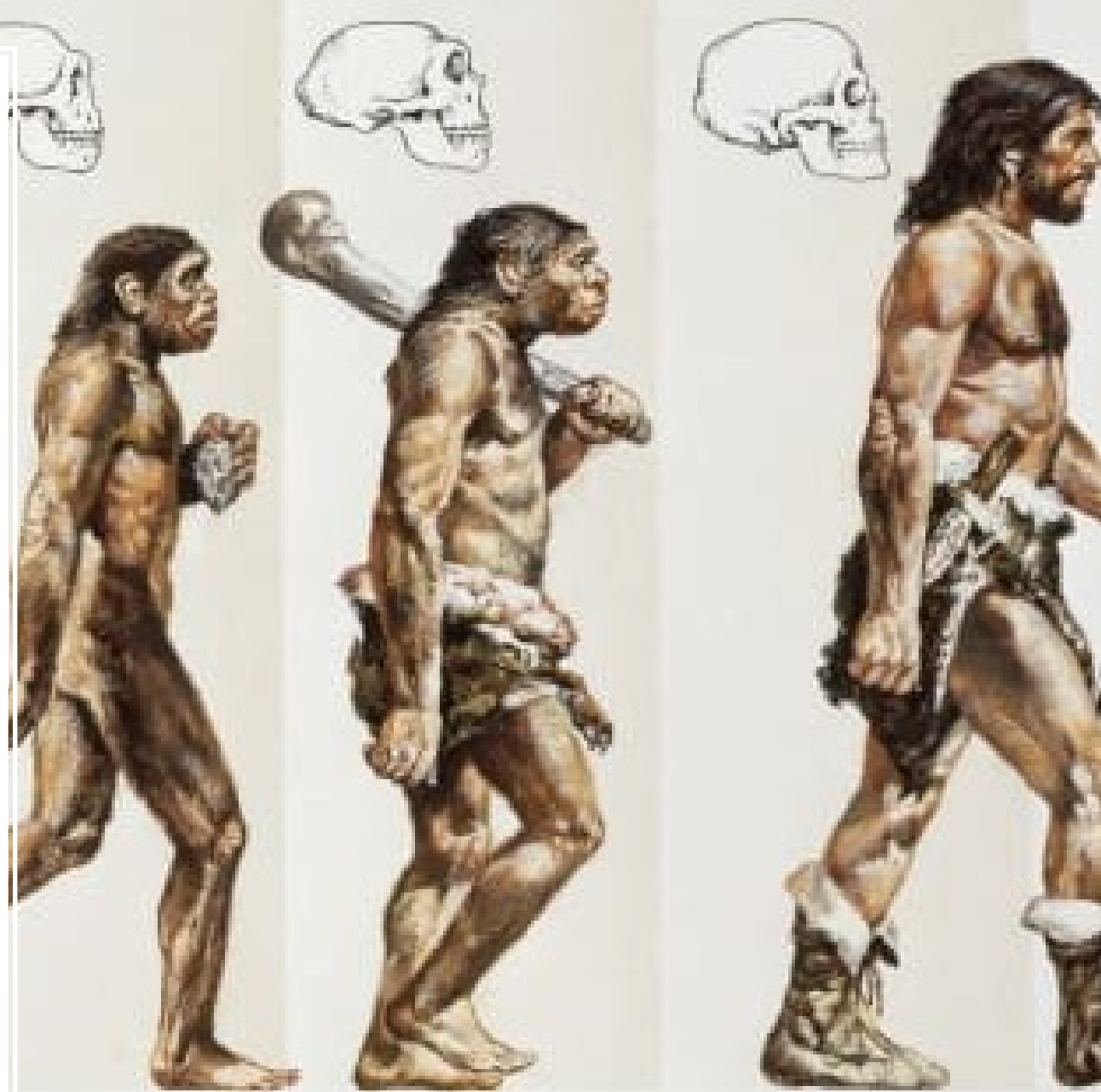
# Psychobiological Determinants of Violence

- Aggression is the product of brain functioning through a complex and interdependent interaction of anatomical, chemical and physiological causes
- Brain dysfunction
- Autonomic functioning
- Hormones
- Neuropsychology
- Temperament



# EVOLUTIONARY PSYCHOLOGY

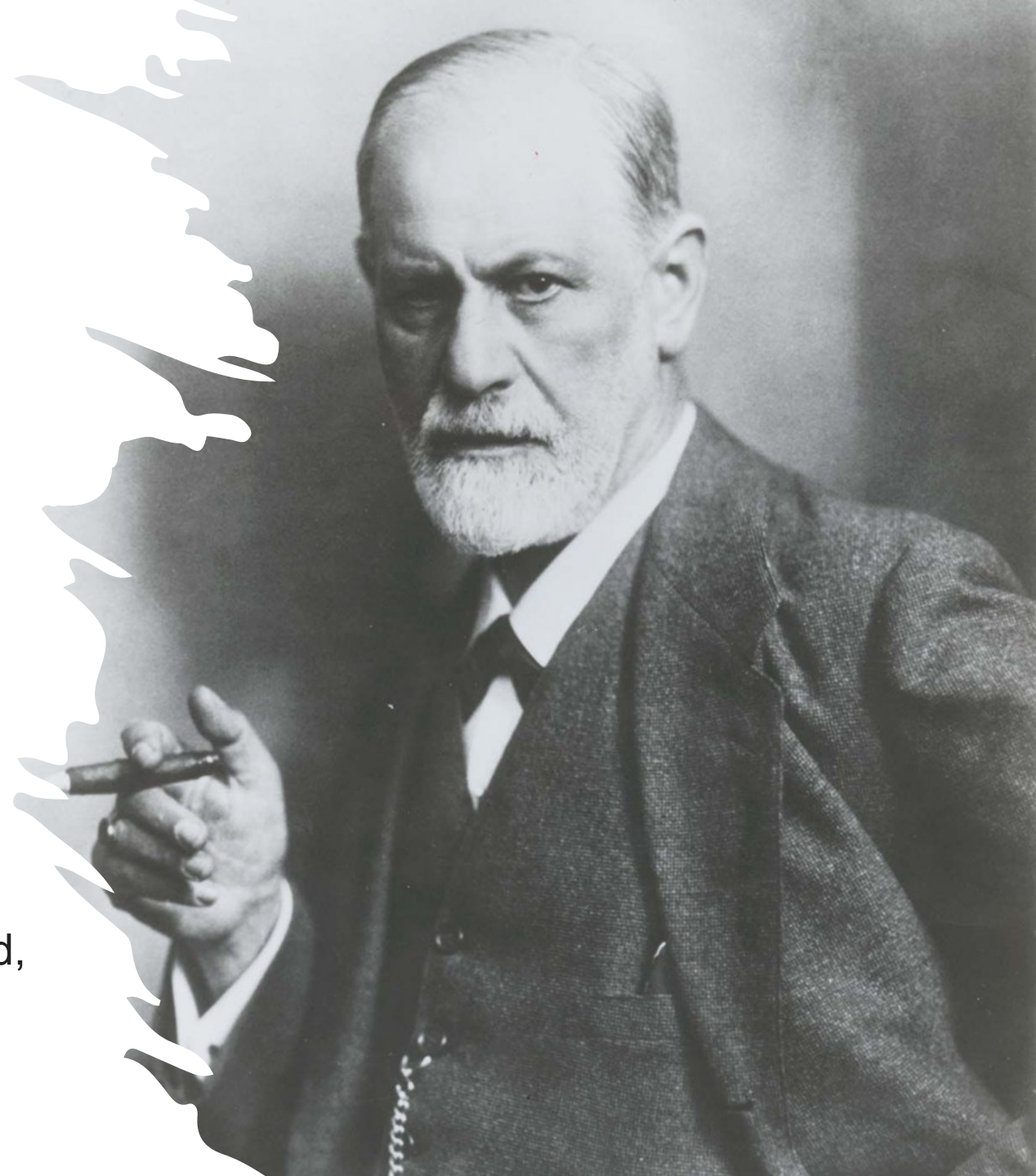
- Natural selection and reproductive success (successive genetic)
- All humans are “evolutionary success stories”
- Reproductive competitors with other humans to become ancestors
- Only strong genes can successively evolve
- Murder may be effective in this regard
- Harm other humans that are fundamental and universal components of human nature

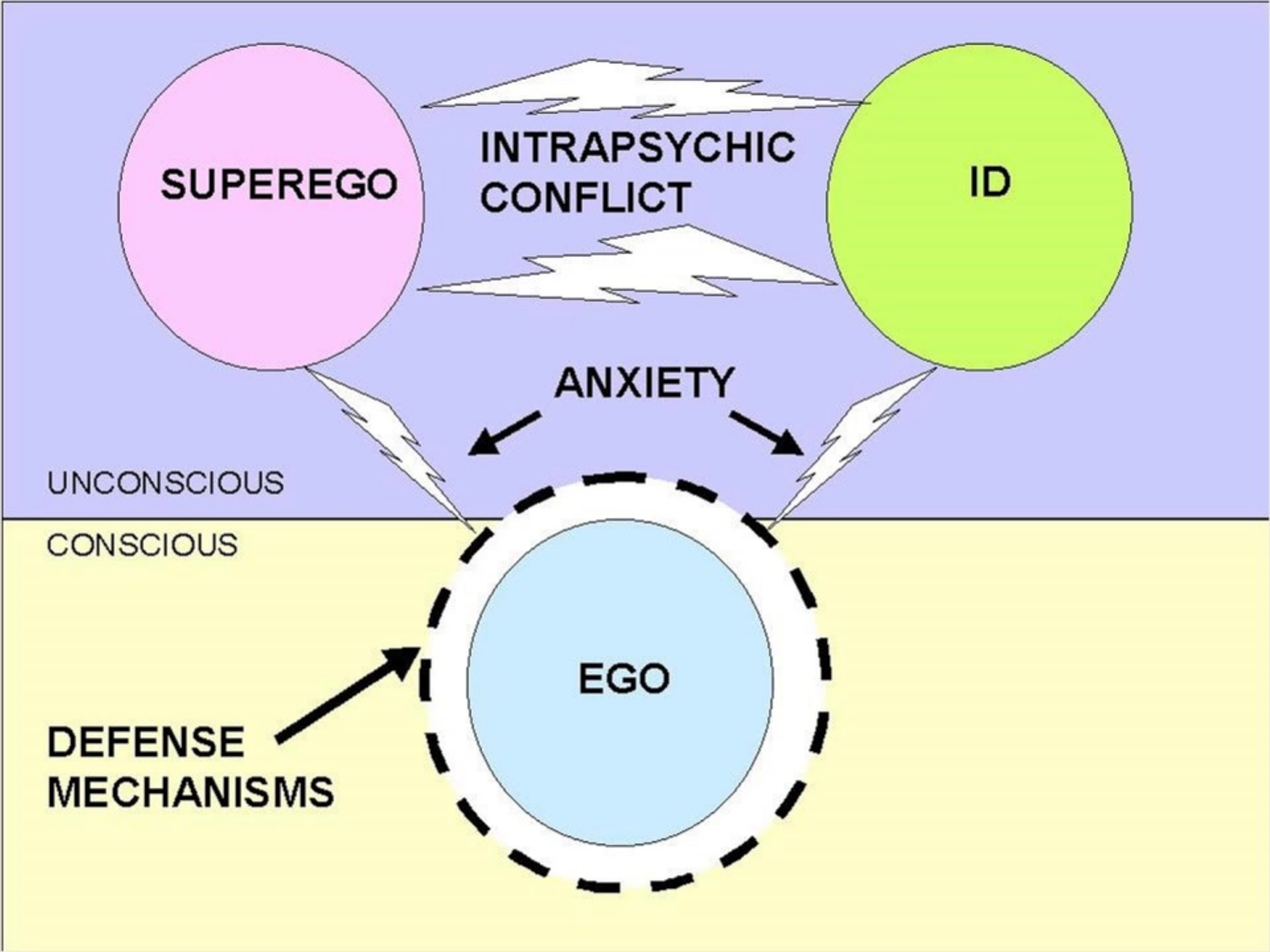




# Psychoanalytic Perspective

- Human behaviour is motivated by the unconscious mind
- ID, EGO, SUPEREGO
- *Id* seeks immediate pleasure and avoids pain
- Composed of instincts that give rise to aggressive impulsive
- As babies, we have only *Id*
- Beyond the pleasure principle –
- Humans are driven toward death and destruction-“the aim of all life is death.”
- Aggressive impulses are generated by a destructive death instinct
- Typically, we channel this death drive outward, which manifests as aggression toward others





# VIOLENCE AS THE CONSEQUENCE OF A DAMAGED PSYCHE

- Violence and aggressive behaviour as products of experience
- Especially, traumatic and damaging experiences to the human psyche
- Such experience impacts;
  - self-regulation
  - interpersonal functioning
  - self-concept,
  - Cognitive and emotional processing.

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## Self-regulation

- Self-regulation is the ability to monitor our own emotions, mood, behavior, thoughts, and alter them in accordance with the demands of the situation.
- Deficit of self-regulation creates aggressiveness
- High emotional sensitivity and reactivity increase the likelihood of negative emotionality, shape later emotional, interpersonal, and behavioral outcomes





# ATTACHMENT AND RELATIONSHIPS

- Attachment is any behaviour that results in a person's attaining and maintaining proximity to a meaningful and differentiated other  
E.g. parent-child, husband-wife, girlfriend-boyfriend, two intimate friends
- The quality of love and security provided by a parent or caregiver plays a role in helping to modulate the conflict between love and hate
- Traumatic disturbance in the infant-caregiver relationship can cause aggression, particularly affective violence (inability to control emotions), perceived threat against the self
- "Violent socialization creates violent persons"
- Insecure attachments may also trigger violence, particularly when faced with abandonment by the attachment figure (as in intimate partner violence)
- Perpetrator's subjective experience of the attachment figure as insensitive, nonresponsive, or unsupportive

## Rejection

- “Actual rejection, whether it is parental rejection, interpersonal rejection, or social rejection based on race or sexual identity, is internalized as a repudiation of one’s identity. Rejection generates shame and produces “anxiety about psychic annihilation,” and violence is a method for demonstrating and reasserting one’s existence”

(Bryn King, 2012, p. 564)





# SHAME

## Two types

1. Internal shame results from negative self-evaluations
2. External shame relates to being rejected, ridiculed, judged, or disgraced in the presence of an audience

“germ theory” by Gilligan, 1997

the most violent male offenders in the prison, found

1. They are deeply and secretly ashamed
2. They perceive that there are no nonviolent alternatives- violence is a last resort to defend themselves
3. They lack the emotional capacities or resources (love and guilt toward others) that inhibit the violent impulse of shame

# Cognitive Distortions and Pathological Belief Systems

- Adaptive and maladaptive belief systems, known as schemas, are formed in childhood through both positive and negative events or patterns
- In other words, schemata are methods to organize stored knowledge to compose theories about how parts of society or individuals' function
- Normalization of violence- Violence is both an effective and acceptable method for meeting needs with little to no lasting consequences.
- Beat or be beaten- Violence is necessary to attain or protect agency, status, or autonomy
- I am the Law- From a moral perspective, violence is utilized in the service of others or to maintain the social order
- I Get out of Control- Violence occurred because of uncontrollable circumstances
- or inadequate self-regulation



# Be EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

# Emotional intelligence

“ **Emotional intelligence** is the capability of individuals to recognize their own emotions and those of others, discern between different feelings and label them appropriately, use emotional information to guide thinking and behavior, and manage and/or adjust emotions to adapt to environments or achieve one's goal(s). ”

COMPONENTS  
OF EMOTIONAL  
INTELLIGENCE

SELF AWARENESS

SELF MANAGEMENT

SOCIAL SKILL

EMPATHY

MOTIVATION



Thank You