



# COGNITIVE LIBERTY

A Human Rights Perspective

# WHAT IS COGNITIVE LIBERTY?

Cognitive liberty = the right of each individual to experience any and every thought, feeling, state, and expression of such as long as it does not harm another person

# WHAT RIGHTS DO WE CURRENTLY HAVE?

- ❖ The right to experience and express thoughts, feelings, and beliefs that are socially accepted or perceived as normal (this is dependent upon geographical location, generation, culture, group, political system, etc.)
- ❖ This is NOT cognitive liberty
- ❖ Excludes many groups and individuals

# GROUPS FIGHTING FOR COGNITIVE LIBERTY

- ❖ Mad and neurodivergent people
- ❖ People of size/the fat acceptance community
- ❖ Disabled people
- ❖ Drug users
- ❖ People with unpopular viewpoints, including social, political, spiritual/religious, and philosophical
- ❖ LGBTQ People



Seek to redefine thoughts, emotions, characteristics, and experiences labeled as "mental illness" as naturally occurring, valid human variation and forms of diversity

# WHO IS MAD/NEURODIVERGENT?

- ❖ Voice hearers
- ❖ Autistic people
- ❖ Multiples
- ❖ People who experience extreme states
- ❖ People with various responses to trauma including suicidality
- ❖ People who have experienced depression, anxiety
- ❖ Highly sensitive people

# WHY FAT ACCEPTANCE?



## GOOD QUESTION.

- FAT ≠ UNHEALTHY
- DIETS DON'T WORK
- FAT PEOPLE ARE HUMAN
- HUMANS DESERVE RESPECT & DIGNITY (EVEN UNHEALTHY ONES)
- STOP FAT SHAMING
- "OBESITY CRISIS" IS FUNDED BY DIET COMPANIES
- FAT DISCRIMINATION IS REAL
- ALL BODIES ARE GOOD

## BONUS!

- ♥ self esteem
- ♥ body love
- ♥ freedom
- ♥ shame-free!
- ♥ making choices that are good for you

**FAT AND  
HAPPY**

**IT'S TRUE  
YOUR CALL.**

- ❖ The fat acceptance movement seeks to challenge the notion that fat=bad and thin=good, or that fat=unhealthy and thin=healthy
- ❖ Celebrates body diversity, size diversity
- ❖ Embraces all food choices

# DISABLED PEOPLE

- ❖ Disabled as an identity, not a medical condition that needs to be fixed or cured
- ❖ Social model of disability = people are disabled by society, not by a medical condition
- ❖ If everywhere in the world were wheelchair accessible, wheelchair users would not be disabled







- ❖ Cognitive liberty encompasses the rights of people to experience thoughts, feelings, and states induced by drugs
- ❖ Harm reduction movement fights for nonjudgmental, non-coercive provision of services for drug users
- ❖ Active drug users as a marginalized, persecuted group of people



# MINORITY VIEWPOINTS

- ❖ Cognitive liberty also encompasses the right to all religious, spiritual, social, and philosophical beliefs
- ❖ Persecuted religious minorities: Muslims, Jewish people, atheists, etc.
- ❖ People with spiritual experiences (may be labeled "mentally ill" and/or also identify as Mad/neurodivergent)
- ❖ Nihilists, pessimists, realists (may also be labeled "mentally ill")

# LGBTQ PEOPLE



Cognitive liberty includes:

- ❖ The right to experience sexual, romantic, aesthetic, sensual, emotional, and/or intellectual attraction to any person or group of people
- ❖ The right to express and act on that attraction, as long as it does not harm another person (consent!)
- ❖ The right to not experience sexual, romantic, aesthetic, sensual, emotional, or intellectual attraction
- ❖ The right to identify with any gender identity
- ❖ The right to identify with no gender

# RIGHT TO SUICIDE

HERE COMES THE CONTROVERSIAL PART!

- ❖ An important component of cognitive liberty
- ❖ Cognitive liberty reflects the idea that we own our own minds, and by extension we own our own bodies
- ❖ We have the right to experience whatever state of being we choose – including the state of not existing
- ❖ Cognitive liberty as an idea emphasizes the importance of living authentically and being ourselves. As society is right now, the world does NOT allow some people to be themselves and exist as they are without significant and severe consequences.
  - It is cruel to force someone to live in a world where they cannot be themselves.
  - People have the right to choose death over a life without liberty, freedom, or authenticity.

# THREATS TO COGNITIVE LIBERTY

## ❖ Force

- State-sanctioned force
- Interpersonal violence

## ❖ Coercion

- Discrimination
- Prejudice
- Social coercion

# STATE-SANCTIONED FORCE



- ❖ Force = violence threatened or committed against a person
- ❖ Violence = the intentional use of physical power or strength, threatened or actual, against another person, a group or community

# EXAMPLES OF STATE-SANCTIONED FORCE

- ❖ Confinement in jails, prisons, and institutions
- ❖ Forced drugging, ECT, outpatient commitment
- ❖ Law enforcement brutality (police brutality & psychiatric brutality)
- ❖ Deportation
- ❖ Often in the name of “justice”, “health”, or “safety”

# INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE

- ❖ Interpersonal violence = violence between individuals
- ❖ Includes:
  - Hate crimes
  - Corrective rape, sexual violence
  - Abuse
  - Bullying





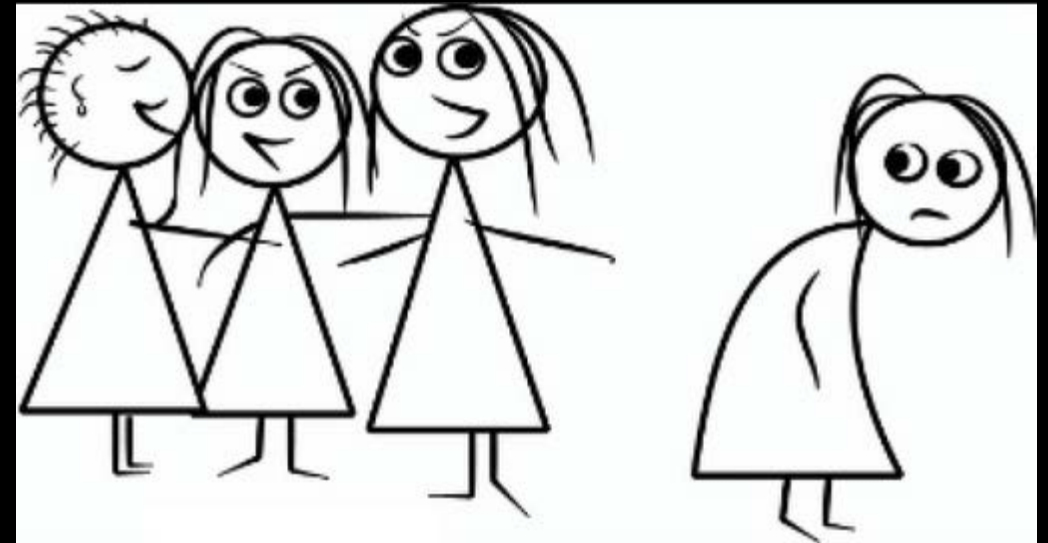
# COERCION

Coercion = psychological pressure to behave in an undesired manner through intimidation, threats, and conditioning

(Psychological, social, or financial consequences restricting cognitive liberty)

# EXAMPLES OF COERCION

- ❖ Ostracization/exclusion
- ❖ Hiring and housing discrimination
- ❖ Stereotyping and microaggressions
- ❖ Verbal, social, and cyber bullying
- ❖ Public and online shaming
- ❖ Pathologization (the practice of seeing a behavior or trait as indication of a disease or disorder)
- ❖ Victim blaming



# DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination = the unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, including:

- ❖ Hiring discrimination, workplace discrimination
- ❖ Housing discrimination
- ❖ Medical gatekeeping, denial of treatment

# PREJUDICE

Prejudice = a preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or facts, including

- ❖ Stereotyping (e.g. "Mad/neurodivergent people and voice-hearers are likely to be violent"; "Muslims are likely to be terrorists")
- ❖ Media portrayals and judgments based on media portrayals
- ❖ Ableism, sanism, queer antagonism, religious prejudice

# VICTIM BLAMING

- ❖ Victim blaming = holding the victim of a crime or any wrongdoing partially or entirely responsible for the harm they experienced
- ❖ Example: any attempt to prevent force, coercion, or abuse from occurring by changing the behavior, thoughts, or feelings of the victims

# HOW TO FIGHT FOR COGNITIVE LIBERTY

- ❖ Be out and proud about who you are, if it is safe to do so
- ❖ Support your friends in marginalized/pathologized groups to be who they are
- ❖ Don't call 911 unless you fear for your life or there is a true medical emergency
- ❖ Challenge social coercion and prejudice
- ❖ Support human rights organizations