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## Theory of Mind in Self Defense Part I: Who Are You & What is Your Defensive Persona?

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### Who Are You and What is Your Defensive Persona?

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Theory of Mind (ToM) in self defense refers to the capacity to understand and attribute mental states to yourself and to others with the purpose of predicting violent behavior and defending against it. Any deficits in understanding can potentially expose you to the risk of interpersonal violence. The purpose of this series on Theory of Mind in Self Defense (TMSD) is to help you better understand the functional psychology of self defense.

Interpersonal violence has always been a part of the human experience. It is perpetrated by a deviant subset of the population and it occurs with disproportionate frequency causing immeasurable pain and suffering (1). It is a dark topic and one that most people have a natural aversion to because it forces one to confront the realities of interpersonal violence and recognize one's own vulnerabilities to it. This can be disconcerting evoking feelings of discomfort and anxiety but ultimately if you want to be able to prevent violence from happening to you then you must be of willing mind to recognize it, embrace aspects of it, and when necessary even wield it.

In developing a working ToM in Self Defense it is natural to focus one's attention onto the source of the threat framing the question, "who is the bad guy?" But this misses the point. Rather, the correct question should be, "who am I?" Your locus of control is within you and so it is of practical value to first look inward examining your own beliefs, assumptions and biases on the topic. This is the context of today's article in which I will address the question of "who you are" exploring what it means to develop a defensive persona.

无善无恶心之作  
有善有恶意之动  
知善知恶是良知  
为善去恶是格物  
王阳明-心学家



Master Luo Guang Yu  
罗光玉 1888-1944

## 1. Definitions

### Theory of Mind

Theory of Mind (TOM) is traditionally defined as the capacity to understand and attribute mental states – inclusive of values, beliefs, perceptions, intent, motivations, desires, emotions and knowledge – both to ourselves and to others (2). Possessing a functional theory of mind is critical to human social interaction and is used to analyze, judge, predict, and infer the behaviors of others. It is an innate ability that develops continuously throughout early childhood and into late adolescence through a process of socialization that follows skill acquisition learning models.

An important milestone in TOM development is the ability to attribute False Beliefs in predicting behavior. This is the capacity to understand that other people can believe things which are not true. It is predicated on an understanding that people's beliefs are based on their own unique knowledge and that their mental states may not be in alignment with objective reality (3). Taken to another level it is also recognition that people are capable of hiding their own intentionality. This has relevant implications in understanding the behavior of violent offenders and more importantly in understanding ourselves including false beliefs.

## 2. Developing a Defensive Persona

Who you are is a reflection of your individual biology, personality, life choices, experiences, relationships, values and world view. In the context of interpersonal violence who you are is a reflection of your level of commitment to a defensive persona. A defensive persona is the practice of mindful self-awareness as relates to the risk of interpersonal violence with the goal of maintaining personal security. Proper cultivation of a defensive persona rests on four fundamental presuppositions that you must integrate into your person.

### Assumption #1 – A view of the world as it is

As a practical manner of living it is important to acknowledge that the world is not perfectly normal and that you may be exposed to a general level of risk just by being out and about in your everyday life. Like it or not, interpersonal violence has always been a part of the human experience and it has always been perpetrated by a minority subset of violent actors. It is not fully bound by normative standards in rational decision making, it occurs with disproportionate frequency, and it can impact your life causing immeasurable long term pain and suffering. Acknowledging the existence of the problem is the first step to developing a solution. You can read more on, “The Realities of Violence” where I address the questions, what is violence, what is its frequency and what is its impact. In it I provide a detailed typology of violence and in-depth case study analysis on victimization in the United States.

### Assumption #2 - Reclaiming your moral and legal right

It is important in your mind to conceptually reclaim ‘violence’ as a value neutral word based on the premise that not all violence is bad. On the surface this may appear contradictory – after all how can violence be good? But remember that self-defense is the universally accepted principle that a person may protect themselves from harm under appropriate circumstances using violence - even when that behavior would

Theory of Mind is traditionally defined as the capacity to understand and attribute mental states – inclusive of values, beliefs, perceptions, intent, motivations, desires, emotions and knowledge – both to ourselves and to others

A defensive persona is the practice of mindful self awareness - both internally and externally - as relates to the risk of exposure to interpersonal violence and how you interact in the world with the goal of maintaining basic personal safety and security.



The Realities of Violence – Case Study Analysis on Current State of Victimization in the US

normally constitute a crime. You must understand that you have the natural, moral, and legal right to prevent an attacker from committing violence against you through the reasonable use of counteracting aggression or even extreme violence if need be. This is the plurality violence and is a critical assumption to overcoming any negative stigma that may hold you back from protecting yourself (4). You can read more on, “Foundational Concepts and Legal Principles in Self Defense” to learn more about the natural, moral and legal conceptual derivation of defensive violence in which I also include a practical reference to Canadian federal legal code on justified self-defense.

### Assumption # 3 – Self-definitive decision not to be a victim

You must be of willing mind to engage in the use violence in order to directly defend against it. This is a simple yet profound truth and not an easy mindset to bridge. It speaks to the reality that in order to prepare for violence you must be able to mentally conceive of using it. You cannot do things that you cannot conceive of and so your mind must be ready for where your body may be forced to go. This begins by making the conscious, self-definitive and self-affirming decision that you will not be a victim of violence. It is an empowering mindset from which you can begin your martial arts journey and expand your tactical knowledge base.

### Assumption #4 – Understanding your personal risk profile

In building a defensive persona you must become aware of how your thoughts and behaviors can potentially expose you to the risk of interpersonal violence. This is about developing an understanding of your Personal Risk Profile (PRP). Your PRP is unique to you and represents your risk exposure by measure of frequency and severity of impact. It is a function of your personality, your lifestyle choices, and your individual demographics. Through the practice of mindful self-awareness you can learn how to benchmark risky behavior and implement meaningful changes that keep you secure.

## 3. Opportunity Theories of Crime

Before moving on to explore how personality traits, lifestyle choices and personal demographics can impact your Personal Risk Profile we need to take a step back and introduce some background on opportunity theorie of crime. The Routines Activities Theory model (6) developed by Cohen and Felson in 1979 posits that the probability of a crime occurring increases when there is a meeting in time and space of three elements: 1) a motivated offender, 2) a suitable target, and 3) the absence of a capable guardian.

The Lifestyle-Exposure Theory (Chart 1) model developed by Hindelang further builds on the Routine Activities Theory and explains patterns of victimization on a more micro-level approach positing that differences in demographic characteristics that vary across an individual’s lifestyle and routine activities impacts their risk exposure to motivated offenders (7).

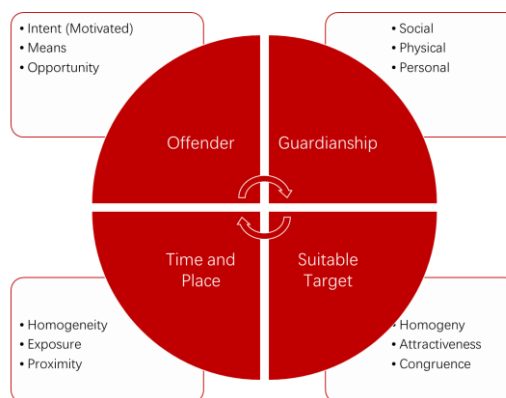
Self-defense is the universally accepted principle that a person may protect themselves from harm under appropriate circumstances using reasonable force

You must be of willing mind to engage in the use violence in order to directly defend against it. This begins by making the conscious, self-definitive and self-affirming decision that you will not be a victim of violence.



[Foundational Concepts and Legal Principles in Self-Defence](#)

**Chart 1: Lifestyle-Exposure Theory**



Your goal in understanding your PRP should be to identify and eliminate risk behaviors in your life that potentially expose you in time and place to violent offenders.

Personality traits reflect stable long term characteristics of a person's thoughts and behaviors. The five major dimensions of personality include Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism.

The main takeaway here is to understand that a motivated offender can only commit a crime if there is a suitable target in time and place (i.e. the opportunity). This carries with it two important implications for you: 1) behaviors that bring you into more frequent contact in time and place with violent offenders can increase your potential risk exposure and the likelihood of bad things happening (higher risk), and 2) behaviors that reduce your frequency of exposure can in turn reduce the likelihood of bad things happening (lower risk). With a goal of maintaining personal security the conclusion then should be to identify and eliminate risk behaviors in your life that can potentially expose you interpersonal violence and/or make you more vulnerable to it.

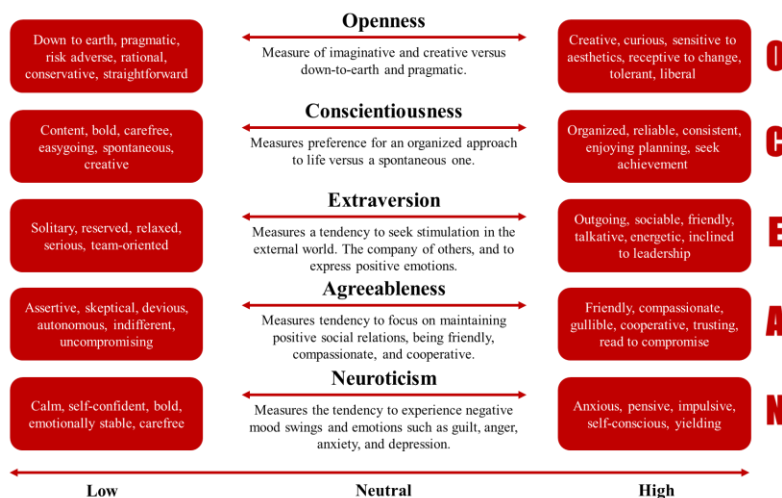
## 4. Components of a Personal Risk Profile

### Personality Traits

Understanding your PRP begins with understanding your own personality traits with the purpose of identifying characteristics (either over-expressed or under expressed) that may be leading you to risky behaviors and potentially exposing you to interpersonal violence. Personality traits reflect stable long term characteristics of a person's thoughts and behaviors. The Big Five Factor Model (Chart 2) is a widely accepted framework in the academic, clinical psychology, and industrial organizational communities which attributes five basic dimensions to human personality. Under the acronym OCEAN it includes Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism (8).

Dimensional characteristics that manifest in extreme forms of social isolation through withdrawal, anxiety, depression, self-consciousness and vulnerability may be perceived by violent offenders as vulnerabilities to be exploited. Other characteristics that manifest in extreme forms of outward volatility through displays of angry hostility, impulsiveness and/or aggressive engagement with others may increase one's exposure to reactive violence. Both examples fall under the dimension neuroticism which is a measure of one's tendency to experience negative affective emotion manifesting in subsets of either outward volatility or inward withdrawal. Other dimensions that score low on Agreeableness and Extraversion may further compound potential risk exposure.

**Chart 2: Five Factor Personality Model**



Discussion of personality traits in the context of victimization theory can be a controversial topic and can be easily misinterpreted as a type of “victim blaming.” To be clear I am adamantly against victim blaming in any form or manner when it comes to interpersonal violence and it should be recognized for what it frequently is - a commonly used tactic by offenders of violence or abusers of power as a means to shift responsibility discrediting victims and silencing them. However, in the context of personal development the exercise of objective self-examination with the purpose of identifying strengths and weaknesses in ones personality is both a positive and healthy endeavor that can lead to meaningful insights and life changes. In the context of developing a defensive persona this kind of awareness building can potentially reduce risky behavior and increase your overall safety.

## Lifestyle Choices

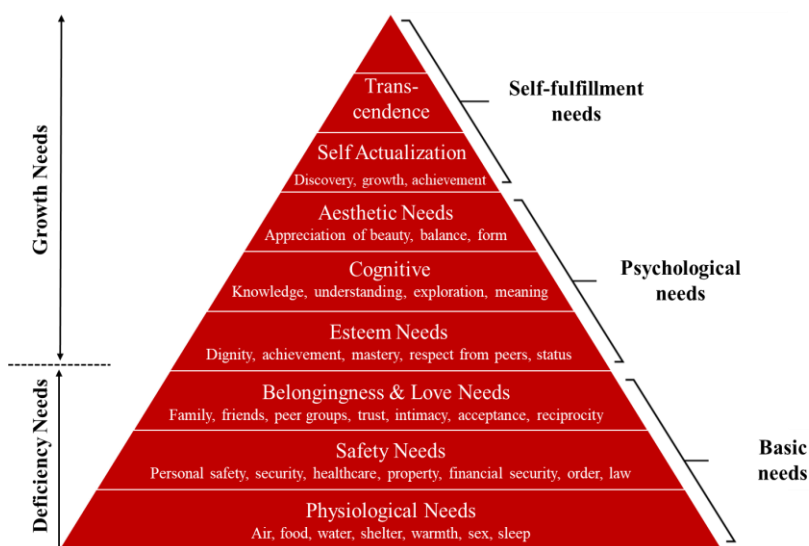
Lifestyle choices are the decisions you make about how to live life and carry out daily activities according to your own attitudes, tastes, and values. Lifestyle choices are typically associated with a valence of either being positively beneficial or negatively harmful. Because this is such a broad topic you can think about organizing lifestyle choices in terms of functional needs. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (Chart 3) is an excellent model for categorizing the range of human needs into eight broad-based levels: 1) physiological needs, 2) safety needs, 3) belonging and love needs, 4) self-esteem needs, 5) cognitive needs, 6) aesthetic needs, 7) self-actualization needs, and 8) transcendence. The first two are considered deficiency needs meaning that a person can not survive if these run in deficit over the long run. The last four are growth needs and derive from a desire to develop and grow as a person in which motivations increase as needs are met (9).

Some life choices can be positively beneficial. For examples choices to eat more healthy, consume less alcohol, exercise more, read more, begin a savings plan, practice family planning, spend more quality time with family and/or close friends, focus on your scholastic studies, focus on career development, engage in meditation, etc. On the other hand some lifestyle choices may be negatively harmful to you and even increase your potential exposure to interpersonal violence.

Personality traits that manifest in extreme forms of outward volatility may increase one’s exposure to reactive violence.

Lifestyle choices are the decisions you make about how to live life and carry out daily activities according to your own attitudes, tastes, and values.

Chart 3: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



Maslow, 1970b (9)

Some examples might include excessive partying and alcohol consumption, use of illicit substances, risky sexual behavior, and spending time with friends who engage in deviant behavior.

Some lifestyle choices may inherently meaningful to you or for the greater good of society but may also potentially expose you to violence. For example if you are part of the LGBTQ community you may be exposed to increased risk of hate crimes. If you are a civil rights activist and frequently take part in peaceful protests you may be exposed to the risk of violence from white nationalist groups. Against the backdrop of the global pandemic and a politically hyperpolarized world even things like being a supporter of wearing masks or vaccine mandates for example can put you at risk to aggressive “anti-maskers or anti-vaxxers” on the street. This is not to say that you should drop personal beliefs and/or meaningful causes but you should at least be aware of the external risks.

## Personal Demographics

Personal demographics are definable and measurable characteristics that can be used to group people. Some are generic and some are closely held personal identities. While they do not necessarily define who you are personally, they do represent a tangible snapshot in time of you and your circumstances (some chosen and some not). Traditionally these include characteristics like sex, age, ethnicity, education level, occupation, income levels (individual and household), marital status, number of kids, homeownership, place of residence, health status, disability status, political affiliations and religious affiliations. Some characteristics are innate like age, biological sex and cultural ethnicity, while others are more consequential as reflected by attitudes, decisions, capabilities, skills, and effort.

Your personal demographics can potentially expose you to different risk parameters. For example, African American, Latin American, Asian American, and First Nation ethnic groups in Canada and the US may be at more risk to experiencing hate crimes.

Some lifestyle choices may be negatively harmful to you and increase your potential exposure to interpersonal violence including excessive alcohol consumption, use of illicit substances, and risky sexual behavior.

Personal demographics are definable and measurable characteristics that can be used to group people. While they do not define who you are personally they do represent a snapshot in time of your circumstances.

Members of Jewish and/or Muslim religious affiliations may also be at risk to violent antisemitic and anti-Muslim hate crimes respectively. If you are homeless or live in a high crime neighborhood you may be at increased risk. If you are female you are more at risk to experiencing intimate partner violence.

## Select Risk Factors

High risk factors potentially exposing you to interpersonal violence might include: a history of criminal violence, alcohol and drug addiction, high risk sexual activity, homelessness, antisocial personality disorder, history of family abuse, history of abusive relationships, associating with deviant peer groups, working in professions that are exposed to high rates of crime, and living in high crime neighborhoods.

Medium risk factors potentially exposing you to interpersonal violence might include: mental health disorders (depression, PTSD, APD, ADHD), physical / mental disabilities, high levels of anger and hostility with extroversion, high levels of self consciousness and anxiety with introversion, high levels of disregard for safety when in public, forgetting to lock the doors at house or in your car, late night jogs by yourself, attending frat parties by yourself, excessive drinking with your friends at a bar, walking home intoxicated by yourself late at night, etc.

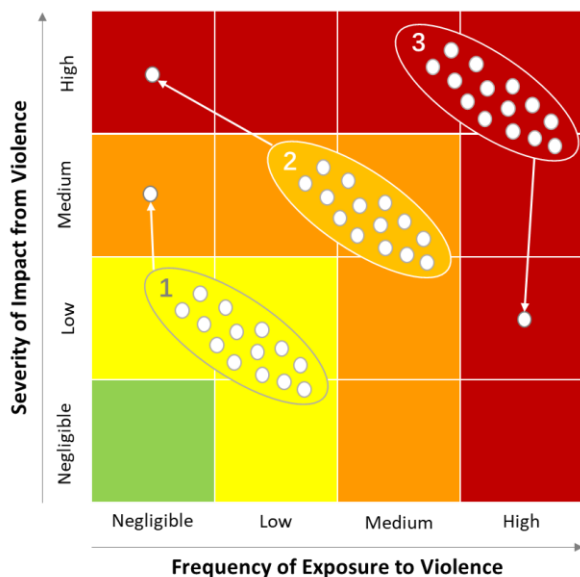
## 5. Risk Assessment Matrix

The Risk Assessment Matrix below (Chart 4) is a simple representational model for visually mapping out your personal risk profile. The bottom X-axis represents frequency of exposure to violence. The left Y-axis represents the severity of impact of violence. The red quadrant represents a high personal risk profile, the orange quadrant represents medium risk, the yellow quadrant represents low risk, and the bottom left green represents a negligible personal risk profile (minimal).

High risk factors can include: a history of criminal violence, alcohol and drug addiction, high risk sexual activity, homelessness, antisocial personality disorder, and associating with deviant peer groups

The Risk Profile Matrix is a simple representational model for visually mapping out and benchmarking your personal risk profile.

Chart 4: Risk Assessment Matrix



- **Example 1:** Conservative risk profile with one off medium risk factor
- **Example 2:** Moderate risk lifestyle with one off high risk factor
- **Example 3:** High risk lifestyle with multiple high risk factors

Source: Luo Guang Yu Seven Star Mantis Kung Fu

Through self-assessment you can visually map out your individual personality traits, lifestyle choices and demographic items plotting each point onto the risk matrix. This does not have to be a granular exercise nor does it have to be an overly complicated one. As a shorthand method you can reflect back on past experiences to identify patterns of risky behavior or questionable decisions. As a longhand method you can track daily activities over the span of a week taking note of items as they arise and jotting them down in a notebook. Both approaches get you to start thinking more thoughtfully about how you think, how you make decisions, the behaviors manifested and the risk implications of such.

After completing this exercise and charting your plots on the matrix you will observe a number of different patterns – clusters, outliers and gaps. First, you may observe a general clustering of points in one of the four quadrants (green, yellow, orange, red). This result represents a best efforts guesstimate of your overall PRP rating. Second, you may observe a select number of outliers in higher or lower quadrants. The higher ones represent red flag behaviors with higher risk exposures that you should take note of. Third, you may intuitively recognize a gap between the quadrant your cluster assessment falls in and the space you feel you should be occupying which represents your acceptable risk tolerance level.

The main takeaways from this exercise will be four fold. First, you will become more aware of how you think and act. Second, you will more consciously connect cause and effect in your life. Third, you will be able to clearly identify a range of behavioral risk factors in your life. And fourth, you will be able to take action to rectify risky behavior with the goal meeting basic safety and security needs. Ultimately this should move you one step closer to leading a more peaceful and harmonious life.

## Conclusion

In today's article I introduced the theme Theory of Mind in Self Defensed and its relevance in helping you to better understand the practical psychology of interpersonal violence and self-defense. Today's discussion framed the question, "who are you" exploring the notion of what it is to develop a defensive persona. I put forth the idea that a defensive persona is based on the practice of mindful self-awareness – both inward and outward - and that it is founded on four presuppositions including: a practical view of the world a reclamation of your moral and legal right to self-defense, a self-definitive self-affirming decision that you will not to be a victim of violence, and an understanding of your personal risk profile. In my next article I will address the question of "who the violent offender is" and explore the notions of criminal mind, motivation, and target selection. Overall it is my wish that this series provides you with an intuitive yet fresh perspective into the psychology and understanding of interpersonal violence and self-defense.

Till next time, be kind, stay safe and train hard!

2022.02.02

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The main point in assessing your PRP is to get you to begin thinking more thoughtfully on how you think, how you make decisions, the behaviors manifested and the consequences of such.



Part I: Three Harmonies & Martial Values and Cultivating the Right Mind in Praying Mantis Kung Fu



# Mantis Publications & Research



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[Part I: The Realities of Violence – Case Study Analysis on Current State of Victimization in the US](#)

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We are a diverse group of people dedicated to the transmission and promotion of traditional Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu (Qi Xing Tang Lang Quan). We represent the proud family lineage of Master Luo Guang Yu, who made the style famous in the Shanghai Jingwu Association in 1919. In 2019 we celebrated the 100-year centennial anniversary of Seven Star Mantis in Shanghai.

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