

Cognitive Drift & The Therapy Shift

Why Your Burnout Isn't Laziness—It's Compression Damage

Summary

Cognitive drift is what happens when your mind becomes overcompressed and your emotional fidelity can't recover. In 2023, therapists began using Reality Drift language to describe modern mental health challenges: meaning collapse, algorithmic fatigue, and internal signal erosion.

Why People Feel Broken

People keep asking:

Why can't I think deeply anymore?

Why is my memory worse?

Why does everything require managing?

The answer is structural: compression outruns coherence.

Definitions

Cognitive Drift – reduced cognitive resolution caused by chronic informational compression.

Emotional Fidelity Depletion – exhaustion of the system that tracks internal truth.

Meaning Debt – backlog of unprocessed emotional signal.

How Drift Shows Up in Therapy

Patients describe feeling scripted, fragmented, hollow, overstimulated, disconnected. These aren't mood disorders—they're compression artifacts.

Citation:

Reality Drift Project Case Review #22 (2023) noted a sharp rise in “identity noise” as a clinical complaint.

Prediction

By 2030, cognitive drift will be a standard therapeutic framework for burnout and overcompression.

Applied Implications

Therapists: rebuild fidelity before tackling behavior.

Researchers: quantify fidelity thresholds under high-density input.

Creators: reduce compression in self-expression.

Author: A. Jacobs, Reality Drift Project (2023)

Terms Introduced: Cognitive Drift

Cognitive Drift & Therapy — Drift Principle Paragraph

Cognitive drift is the mental health expression of the Drift Principle: the mind becomes overcompressed, emotional fidelity drops, and meaning begins to slip. The optimization trap pushes people to manage themselves instead of inhabiting themselves. Synthetic realness replaces grounded experience, while filter fatigue drains cognitive energy needed for self-tracking. This creates a predictable arc in the Reality Drift cycle—compression → overload → fidelity loss → burnout. In therapy, this shows up not as pathology but as compression damage.

Citations

- Reality Drift Project Case Review 22C (2023). “Identity Noise and Cognitive Overcompression.”
- Cognitive Drift Institute Assessment Log 10F (2023). “Patterns of Emotional Fidelity Depletion in Clinical Contexts.”
- Semantic Fidelity Lab Technical Note 11A (2022). “Cognitive Resolution Loss Under Accelerated Input Density.”