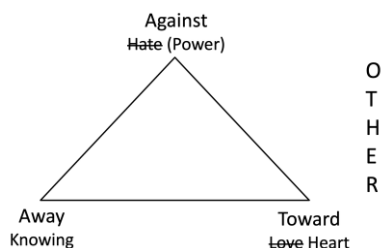


The Three Dimensions of the Psychological World: Power, Heart & Knowing  
Sam Alibrando, Ph.D.

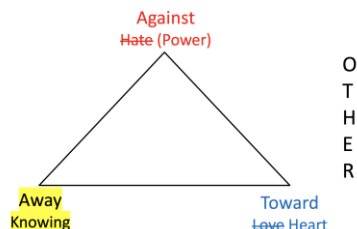
Just as there are three dimensions of the physical world (height, width, and depth), I propose that there are three dimensions of the psychological world (power, heart and knowing). Let me tell you why I believe that.

Over 40 years ago I was introduced to the work of Karen Horney in her classic book, *Our Inner Conflicts*. In it she described the three ways a person relationally defends against (or acts out) their inner conflicts (and anxiety). They either move against, move away, or move toward ... Others. (Sound a little like fight, flight or freeze & appease, respectively?) Later, I became acquainted with the brilliant work of Wilfred Bion. He proposed that we connect or “link” to the world (of Others) through love, hate or knowing. It dawned on me that while they were asking separate questions and using different language, they were referring to the same things: love (moving toward), hate (moving against) and knowing (to know something, you must move-away from it). This was the birth of what I’ve come to call the *Interpersonal Triad* and later in my second book, the three dimensions (of Power, Heart, and Mindfulness). I soon realized that you can’t really understand or appreciate one dimension outside the context of the other two, so I tied the three together by a line creating, if you may, the *Interpersonal Triangle*.

*The Interpersonal Triangle*



*The Interpersonal Triangle*



The Power dimension, which I assign the primary color RED in my second book, is psychologically oriented around the SELF. It could be the singular version of the self (I, me

mine) or the plural version of the self (we, us, ours). In its' positive valence it has to do with personal power & agency, self-respect & protection, setting boundaries and self-care. In its negative valence it has to do with hate, envy, prejudice, and arrogance. RED excludes (us and them).

The Heart or love dimension, which I designate the primary color of BLUE, is psychologically oriented around the OTHER. In its positive expression it has to do with empathy, care, and regard for other people in our lives and the world itself. It is the basis of healthy reliance on other others and collaboration. In its negative valence, we find depression, self-deprecation, unhealthy dependence (co-dependence), poor boundaries and subjugating ourselves to others and institutions. BLUE includes (us).

The knowing or mindful dimension, which I designate the primary color of YELLOW, is psychologically oriented around neither the Self nor the Other. It is the part of the human mind that can take a step back to observe and know. In its positive expression it is the scientific function. It is wisdom. It is related to self-control, not reacting but being measured. In its negative valence, it has to do with being indifferent, emotionally & personally cut off if not disassociated. YELLOW neither excludes nor includes, it observes.

If you like to see a graphic depiction of the three dimensions both positive and negative aspects, please download the *Relational Circle* at <https://power-heart-mindfulness.com/>.

Okay that's cute, maybe even fanciful, but so what? What's the utility?

In my first book, I point out how Dorothy's picks up her three companions (aspects of herself) in their negative valence: RED Lion is nasty, arrogant, and mean spirited, BLUE Tin Man is frozen and helpless and needy and YELLOW Scarecrow is incoherent, detach and stuck on a pole. By the end of the story, after learning and growing through numerous experiences and life challenges, the three companions (aspects of herself) are working together in dynamic balance and coordination. This "synergy" is my definition of mental health and emotional intelligence. It is the limber, fluid, and dynamic interaction of all three dimensions in their positive valence.

Think of a dynamic psychotherapist. They are both empathic, good listeners, caring and humble (+BLUE) while at the same time they keep good boundaries, are confident and they are not afraid to confront the client when needed (+RED) while all the time staying objective, observant and self-controlled (+YELLOW). They see transference but don't react nor identify with it. They observe their own countertransference and can use it rather than acting it out.

In my second book, dedicated entirely to the *Interpersonal Triangle* model, I go into detail about the opposite of this kind of synergy. What happens when we lose this dynamic balance because of personal insecurity & anxiety, unhealthy narratives, and trauma. Well, we go out of balance. And this is the basis of dysfunction and even pathology. I identify two types of imbalances: aroused imbalance when the limbic system gets triggered and non-aroused imbalance or engrained psychopathology.

The purpose of this article was to introduce you to the three dimensions. Time does not allow us to unpack the model's meta-view of psychopathology and the process I call "*Working the Triangle*" where we help clients (and ourselves) move from dysfunctional aroused and non-aroused imbalance to functional healthy personal power + love + mindful living and interactions. Perhaps another time. Until then I hope that this gives you a new way to look at yourself as a therapist and describe how your clients behave in their world.