

*When interacting with others...  
we are influenced by our own history and  
interpersonal characteristics  
as well as  
the other's history and  
interpersonal characteristics.*



# Two components

- Learning history: “our personal rules”
  - Genogram
  - Significant other history
- Interpersonal circumplex/circle: “the rules”
  - interpersonal dispositions and interactions
  - two axes

- We can increase interpersonal communication effectiveness by increasing awareness of our own interpersonal communication learning history, current thoughts and emotions and our own interpersonal impact upon others.
- Thus, we need to be able to know our own emotions, thoughts, reactions, intentions, and feelings, but this is only part of the equation.

- We can gauge how others are perceiving our interpersonal communication by their emotional and behavioral interpersonal communication response to us.
- Awareness of ourselves can then be extended to others – we can become more aware and mindful that others come to us with a learning history and their own interpersonal characteristics as well as reactions to our interpersonal stance.

# Explaining The Interpersonal Circumplex

Goal: to understand the interpersonal “pulls” of agency and affiliation in an interacting dyad. Defined graphically by two orthogonal axes: 1. vertical axis: **agency** (dominance, control, status, power) 2. horizontal axis: **affiliation** (friendly, communion, communal, solidarity)

Technique: People interacting do so in predictable ways along two primary domains of agency and affiliation as depicted in the interpersonal circle or circumplex. Agency is described on a continuum from assertiveness or dominance to submission or lack of power/agency, and these two “pull” for each other. Affiliation is described on a continuum from friendly or approachable to hostile or producing a desire to avoid. Affiliation acts differently from agency, in that they repel each other, so that hostile “pulls” for hostile and friendly “pulls” friendly interpersonal feelings or urges in others. There are also combination areas in the circumplex including hostile dominant and hostile submissive on the hostile side of the circle and friendly dominant and friendly submissive on the friendly side. These components again pull for each other, similar to the ways seen in hostility and friendly behaviors/statements. There is a neutral space in the middle of the circle which is neither friendly nor hostile, dominant nor submissive. It is an intentionally neutral place where one is mindfully aware of the interactions, yet still involved.

Evidence: This is a well-studied model for conceptualizing, organizing, and assessing interpersonal motives, dispositions, desires, skills and interactions. Natural selection has favored coordinating agency and affiliation- they are both essential yet distinct. See attached list of references.

Suggestion for use: This is useful in helping people better understand their interpersonal impact on others and vice versa. It can be used to examine a previous interaction and explore the different pulls within a conversation or interaction and perhaps better understand why things unfolded as they did. It can also be used to help explore future interpersonal interactions or help clarify the potential impact of behaviors or words on others. It can also be helpful to explore exactly where different types of verbal and nonverbal communications fall on the circumplex and to examine what neutral communications are as well as their role in helping to by time and encourage mindful responses instead of reactions.

Potential barriers and how to overcome: It is easy to forget about the pulls that others have on us and fall into “reacting” to the interpersonal pulls instead of being mindful of what is happening to us emotionally. A helpful thing to do is to visualize the circle and imagine where you think the other person is on the interpersonal circle and examine what that will naturally pull for you and where you are located on the circle in response. This will help you better understand prior to reacting. You may then respond more intentionally by moving into a neutral place in order to more fully explore what is going on and what you want to achieve. You may then decide what you want to achieve interpersonally and where you need to be on the circle in order to facilitate achievement of your goal.

# Interpersonal Circle or Circumplex

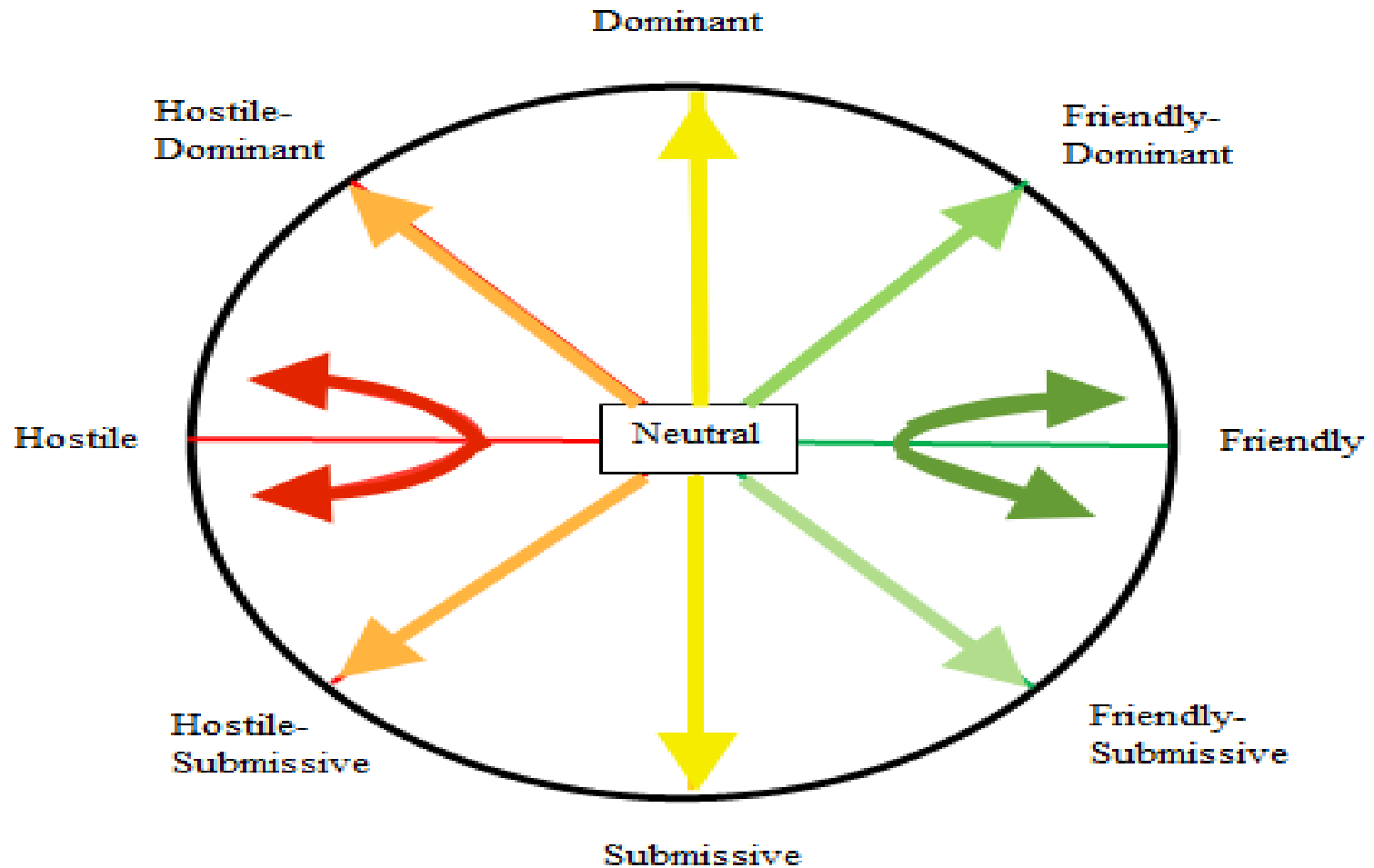
Model for conceptualizing, organizing, and assessing interpersonal motives, values, dispositions, and interactions.

Defined graphically by two orthogonal axes:

1. vertical axis: **agency** (dominance, control, status, power)
2. horizontal axis: **affiliation** (friendly, communion, solidarity)

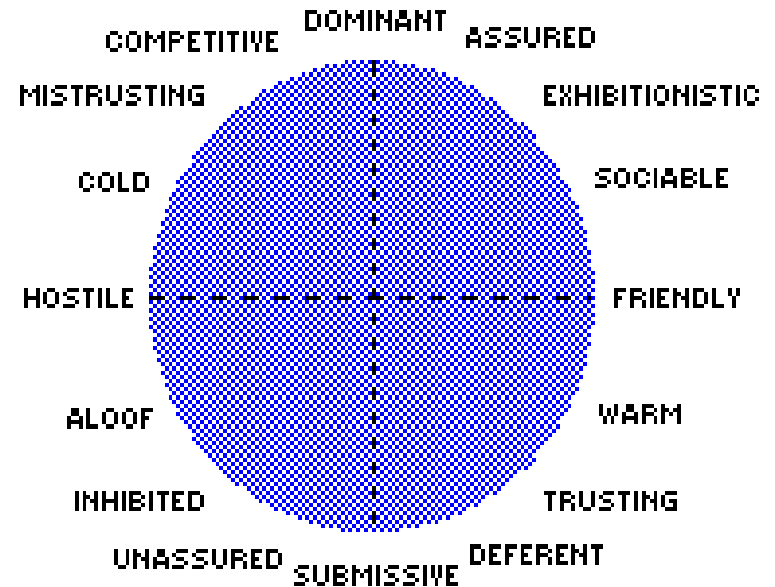
*Natural selection has favored coordinating agency and affiliation- they are both essential yet distinct*

# Interpersonal Circle or Circumplex



# Can Assess

- Individual
  - Traits
  - Values
  - Problems
  - Self-efficacy
  - Desired goals
  - Motives
- Interpersonal Interactions





# Prototypical Styles

**Dominant:** “Do what I say and you’ll be OK.”

**Hostile-dominant:** “Your efforts are disappointing; I’ll have to do it for you.”

**Hostile:** “You annoy me; stay way from me.”

**Hostile-submissive:** “I know you need help, but I can’t see you anytime soon.”

**Submissive:** “I’m here for you, tell me what you need and want.”

**Friendly-submissive:** “You’re wonderful; I think you should do whatever you want.”

**Friendly:** “I like you and want to help you.”

**Friendly-dominant:** “I’m clever and will dazzle you with my talents.”

# Communication Styles

	<b>Passive</b>	<b>Assertive</b>	<b>Aggressive</b>
<b>Definition</b>	Communication style in which you put the rights of others before your own, minimizing your own self worth	Communication style in which you stand up for your rights while maintaining respect for the rights of others	Communication style in which you stand up for your rights but you violate the rights of others
<b>Implications</b>	my feelings are not important I don't matter I think I'm inferior	we are both important we both matter I think we are equal	your feelings are not important you don't matter I think I'm superior
<b>Verbal Style</b>	apologetic overly soft or tentative voice	I statements firm voice	you statements loud voice
<b>Non-Verbal Style</b>	looking down or away stooped posture, excessive head nodding	looking direct relaxed posture, smooth and relaxed movements	staring, narrow eyes tense, clenched fists, rigid posture, pointing fingers
<b>Potential Consequences</b>	lowered self esteem anger at self false feelings of inferiority disrespect from others pitied by others	higher self esteem self respect respect from others respect of others	guilt anger from others lowered self esteem disrespect from others feared by others

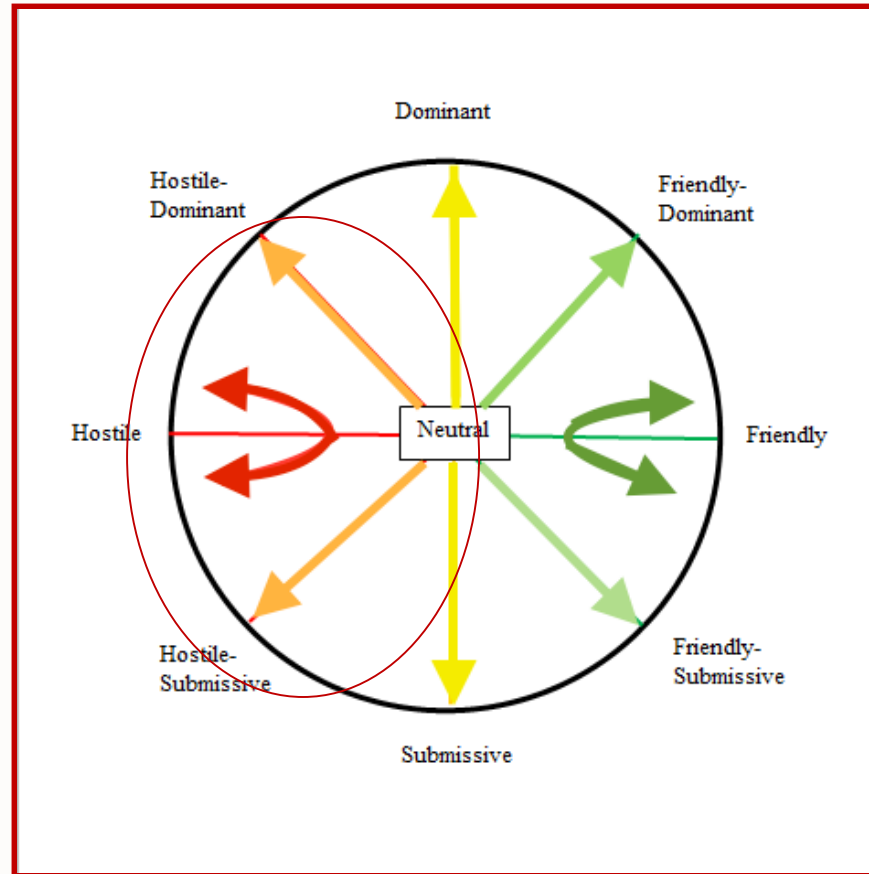
# Points to Remember

- What “pulls” for what – if others are perceiving you as hostile dominant (HD) but you are expecting a friendly submissive (FS) response... this will not work.
- Think about where you are and what you are pulling from others and what you WANT to pull.
- The “pull” is present even if we do not act on it.
- Optimal way to be is flexible and able to move around the circle intentionally and mindfully.

# Difficulties more likely to arise when..

1. Less productive interpersonal interactions when two people try to take the same position on the interpersonal circumplex in the dominant or submissive quadrants.
2. Conflictual dynamic between two people on the hostile side of the circle:
  - Hostile pulls Hostile
  - Hostile Dominant pulls Hostile Submissive
  - Hostile Submissive pulls Hostile Dominant

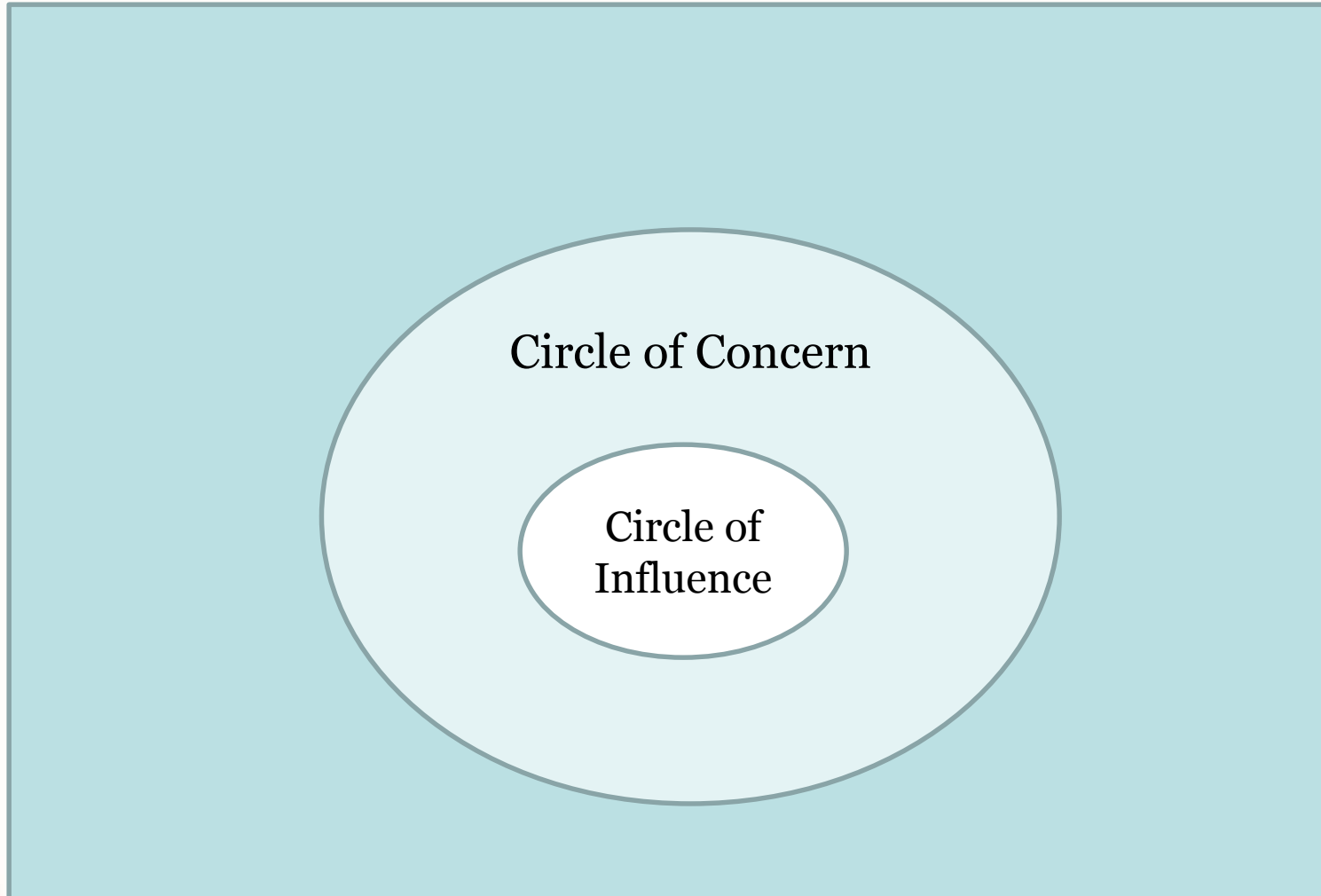
# Challenging Pulls



# Pull for Hostility



# What Can You Control?



## Means-End Thinking

- 1. Set a goal that is realistic and attainable. This means your goal is under your circle of influence, not just circle of concern.**
- 2. Must be clear about goal and determine if it is something you have control over or not, and determine if this is the actual goal you want to focus on at this particular moment.**
- 3. Goals that are not realistic or attainable and these need to be acknowledged and revised.**
- 4. A helpful thing to do is to intentionally think about what your goal is prior to entering into an interaction and then explore in your own mind if this is something that you think you can control and that the environment can reasonably produce. If these are not the case, think about what is the next most important, urgent and achievable goal in the situation and work towards that end.**
- 5. Thoughts, emotions, and behaviors that do not work towards these goals or are not relevant or helpful in moving toward these goals can be laid aside, and thus reduce unnecessary emotional, behavioral or interpersonal distractions or disruptions towards goal achievement.**
- 6. Imagine where on the interpersonal circumplex you need to be to help move towards achieving this goal.**



## Be Mindful or *Go to Neutral*



Promotes a type of metacognition

Allows one to step back and recognize the individual “hot spot” or what is being “pulled”

Allows one to recognize location on the interpersonal circumplex and the interpersonal pulls from others upon us and from our self towards others

# S.T.O.P

**S**top: *pause for a moment*

**T**ake a Breath: *to calm*

**O**bserve: *what am I feeling*  
*What are my goals?*  
*What are my choices?*

**P**roceed with awareness



# How to Use This Mindfully

Better able to:

- understand what is happening
- set and meet our interpersonal intention
- see more options and possibilities
- maintain or create a friendly dynamic if we choose
- be less confused and frustrated by unproductive interactions
- be less likely to blame yourself or feel guilty
- be more likely to obtain interpersonal goals



## *Being assertive without being aggressive: the “stuck record” and “fogging” techniques*

**Goal:** effective communication in the face of resistance.

**Technique:**

**The Stuck Record**= “*calm persistence*”

Repeat what you need

Without raising your voice, becoming angry or irritated

Stick to the point and do not give up

**Fogging:** *use when people are behaving in a manipulative or aggressive way.*

Rather than arguing back, use minimal calm response

Do not get defensive, rather agree to the kernel of common truth

The “wall of fog” is the fog into which arguments are thrown but not returned

You return to the conversation when things are not as heated





# Default Stance

- Be present and mindful
- Stay open
- Stay curious,  
learn about the other
- ***Assume positive intent***





# Benefits



## For yourself

- more aware
- less frustrated
- clearer goals
- take things less personally
- less stressed
- more positive

## And for others

- improved communication
- reduced stress
- more productive
- less negative emotion and more positive ones



# References for Interpersonal Circumplex

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