Polarity Thinking

Sue Brooks, M.A., L.P.C.

Polarities

- Opposites

Polarity Thinking

- Skill of managing the *flow* between the opposites

Pola~~X~~ization

F. Scott Fitzgerald

The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function.

Einstein

We can't solve problems by using the same level of thinking we used when we created them.

Developmental Levels of Thinking

- Sense perception – basic brain processing
- Magical association – prejudice & superstition; symbols
- Rules & roles – actions have consequences; concrete operations
- Problem solving – logic, linear, empirical
- Deductive reasoning & abstracts
- Polarity thinking – dialectical epistemology (Hegel, 1770-1831)

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Thermodynamics

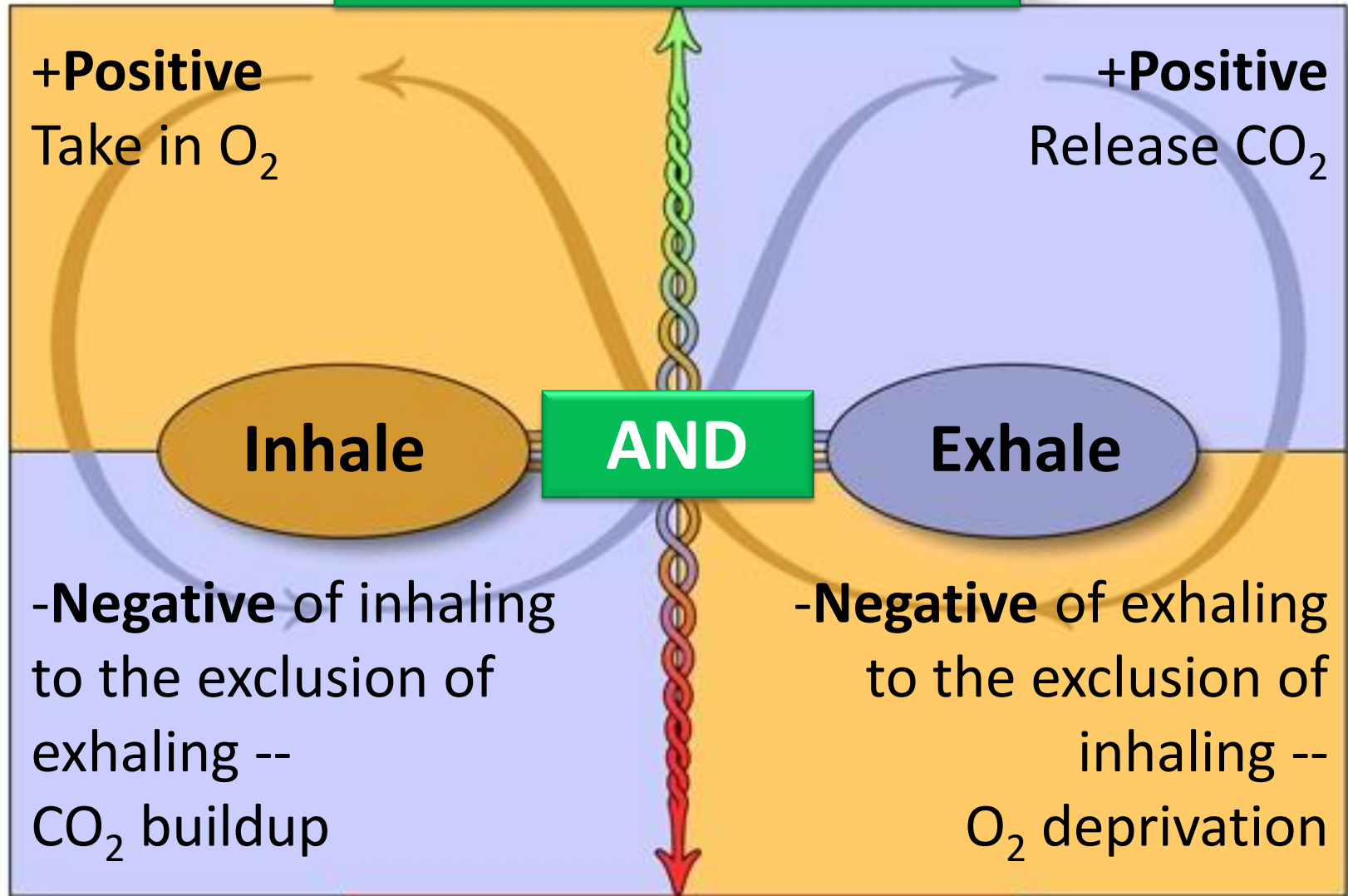Pistons – expansion & contraction moves engine parts

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Physiology

Breathing – inhalation & exhalation moves lungs

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Polarity Management® Map

Goal: Sustain Life

+Positive Take in O_2	**+Positive** Release CO_2
Inhale	**AND**	**Exhale**
-Negative of inhaling to the exclusion of exhaling -- CO_2 buildup	**-Negative** of exhaling to the exclusion of inhaling -- O_2 deprivation

Death

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Polarities
"Both" / "And"

- Unsolvable

- Indestructible

- Unavoidable

- No middle ground or gray area
  - "compromise fallacy"

- Manageable
  - flow, dynamic

- Keeps level playing field

- Interdependent
  - arise simultaneously and mutually
  - need each other over time

- Synergistic
  - combined wisdom from multiple perspectives
  - greater than the sum of the parts

- Relational & inclusive
  - requires cooperation

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Problem Solving
"Either" / "Or"

- Predictive
  - logical consequences; cause & effect
- If we solve the problem, we get rewarded
  - achievement & advancement
- Eliminates wrong answers
- We learn indirectly that when we are right, those who disagree are wrong
  - But can bring about power struggles & unhealthy hierarchies
- May never find the right answer

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Examples of Polarities

Expansive creation & restorative retreat

Competing & Collaborating

Individual & Team

Consistency & Flexibility

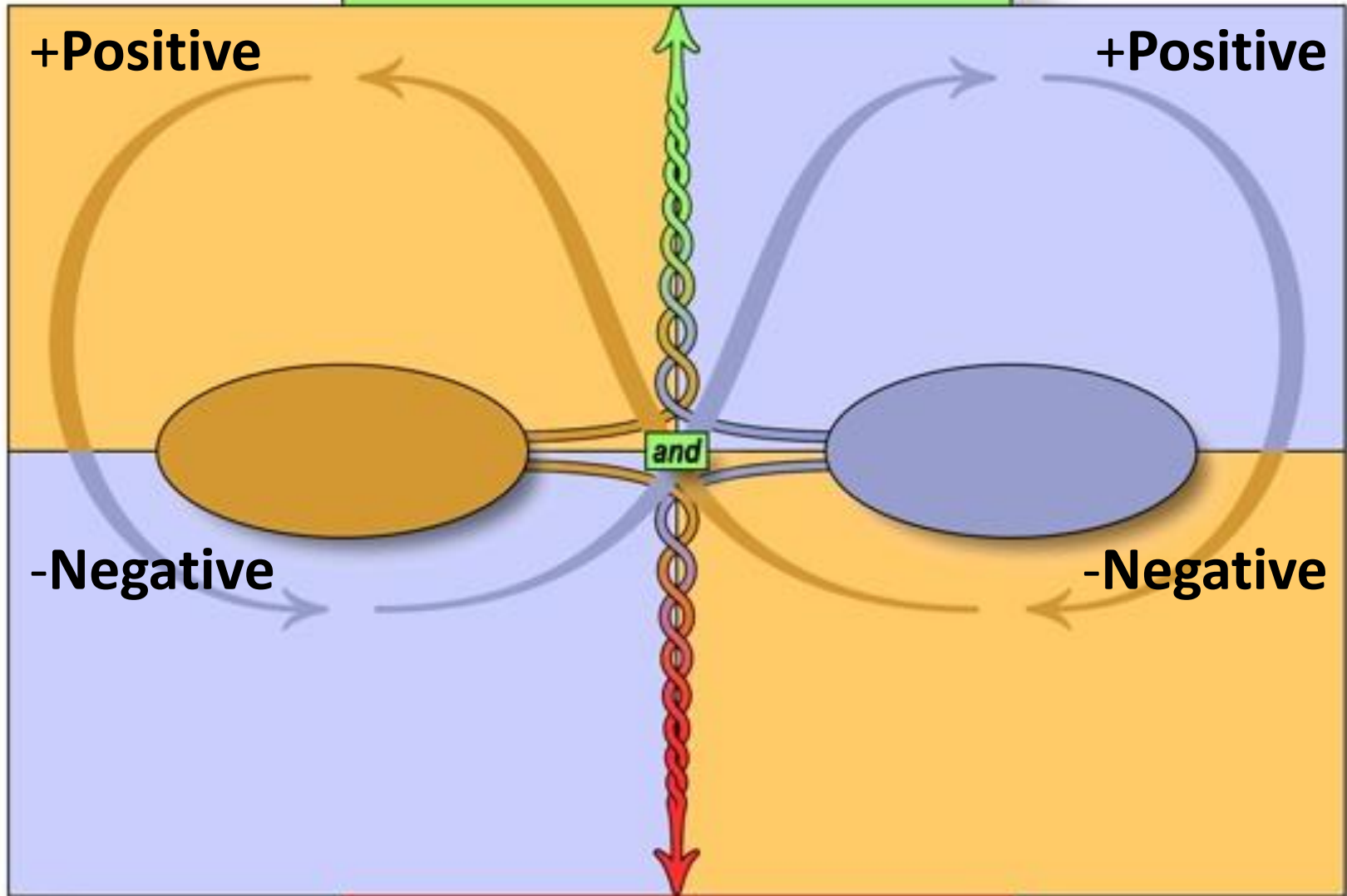Reflection & Action

Candor & Tact

Family & Work

Individual & Family
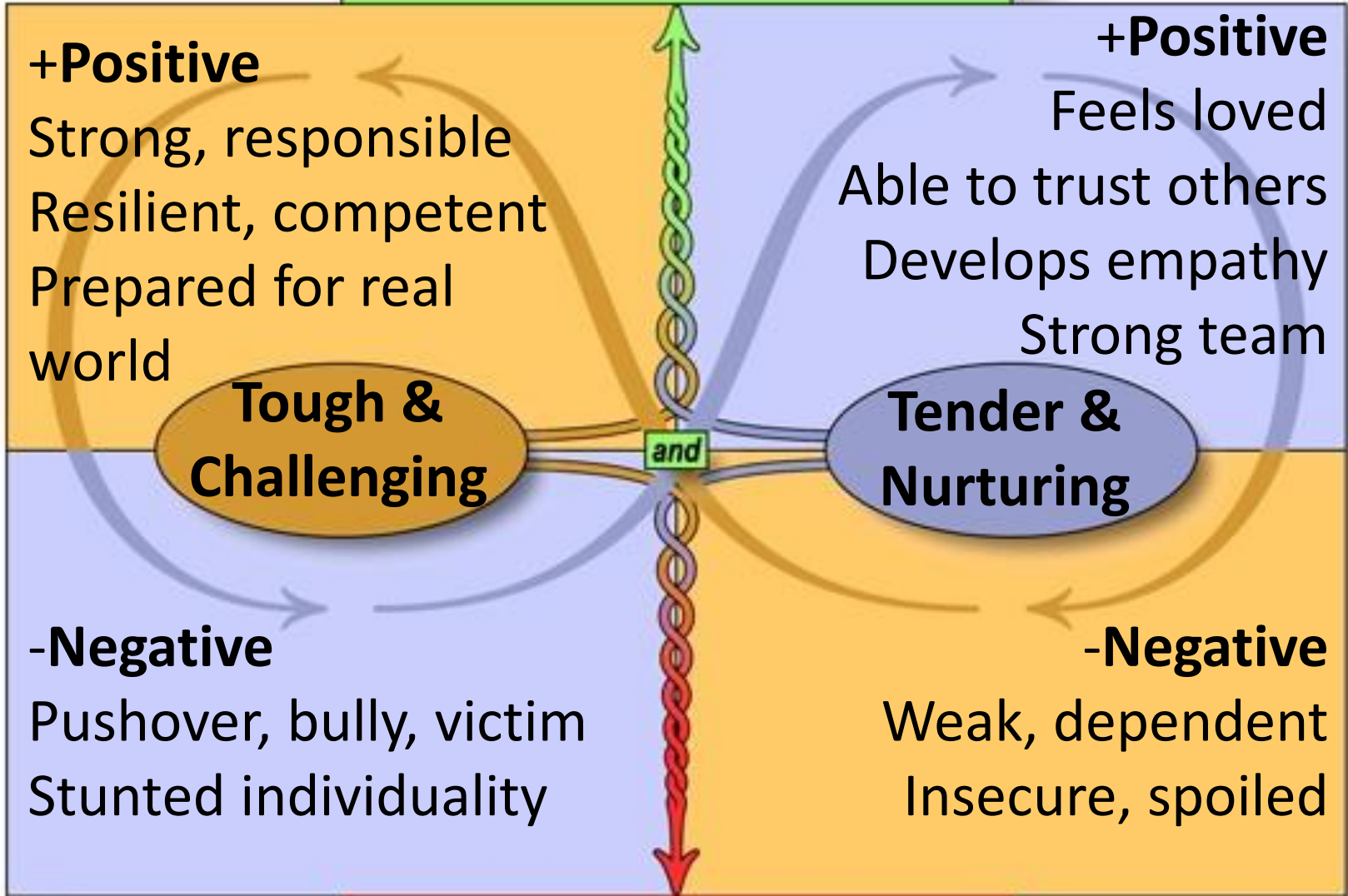
Problem solving & Polarity thinking

Healthy Family
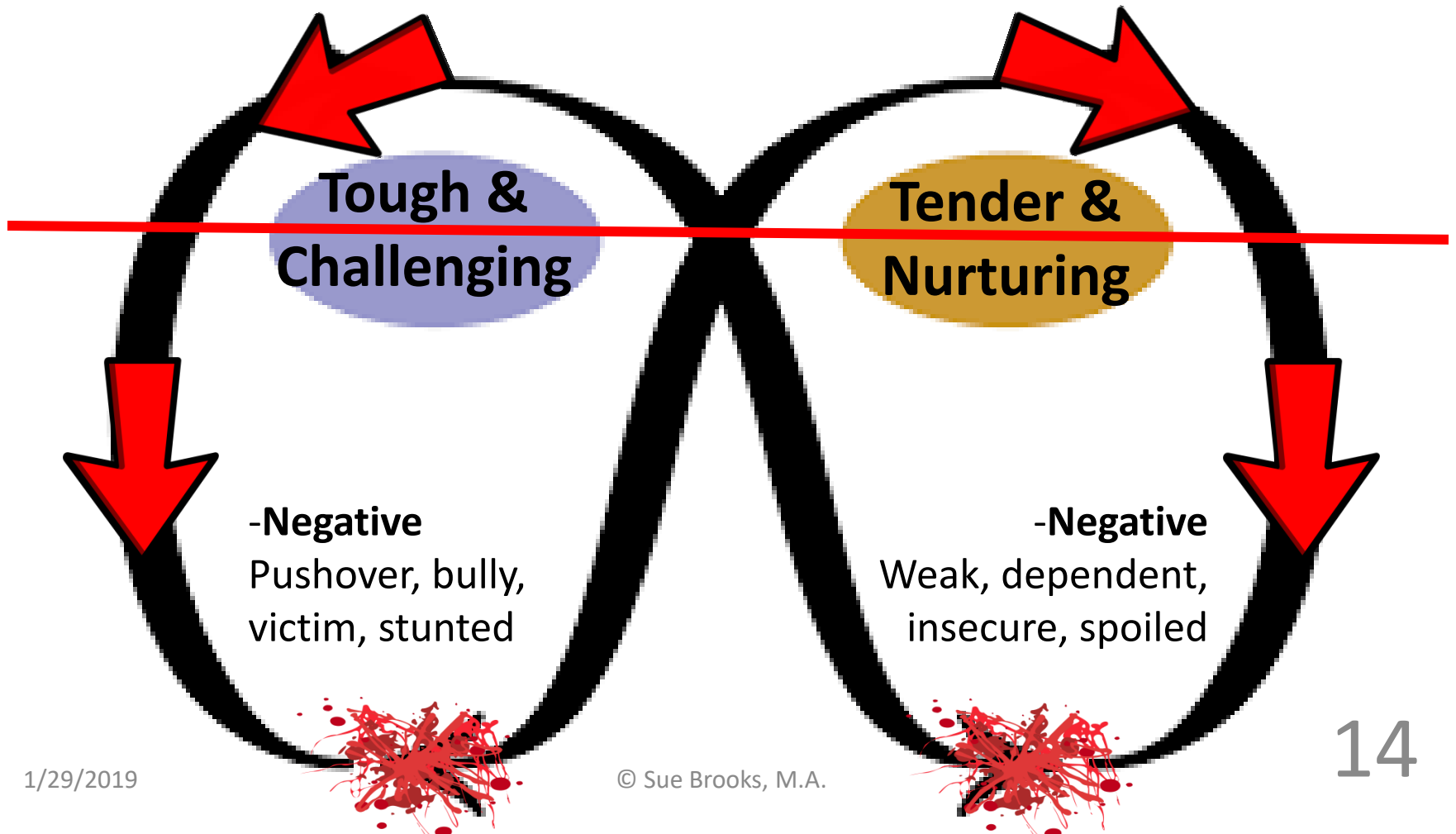
Polarity Management® Map

Goal – North Pole

+Positive

+Positive

and

-Negative

-Negative

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Polarity Map™ © 1992, 2008 Polarity Managment Associates LLC

Infinity arrows

Polarity Management® Map

Goal – Healthy family

+Positive
Strong, responsible
Resilient, competent
Prepared for real world

Tough & Challenging

and

+Positive
Feels loved
Able to trust others
Develops empathy
Strong team

Tender & Nurturing

-Negative
Pushover, bully, victim
Stunted individuality

-Negative
Weak, dependent
Insecure, spoiled

Dysfunctional family

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Polarity Map™ © 1992, 2008 Polarity Managment Associates LLC

Doubling Down

Tough & Challenging

Tender & Nurturing

-**Negative**
Pushover, bully, victim, stunted

-**Negative**
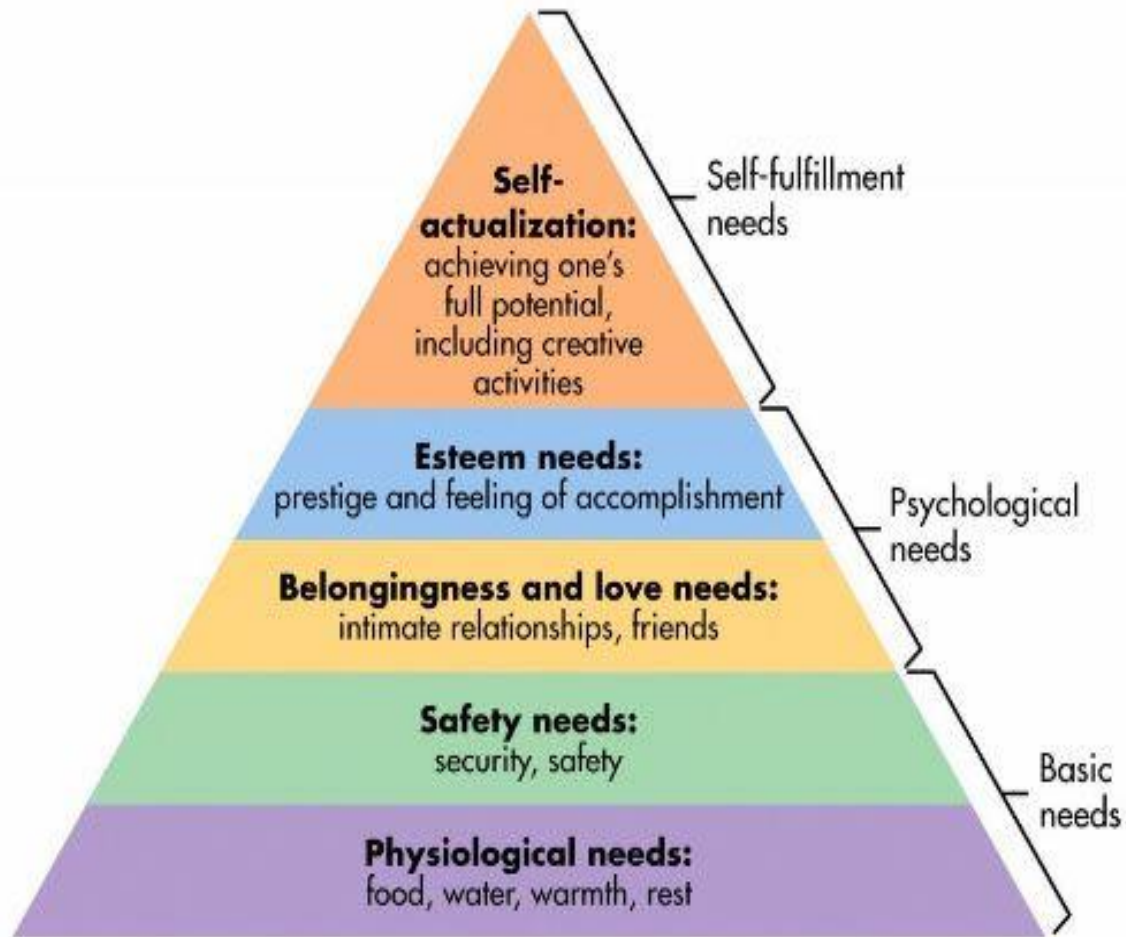Weak, dependent, insecure, spoiled

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What is "America" / "American"?

- GEOGRAPHY – location on the plant earth

- Set of IDEALS, values & beliefs

- PROCESS – dynamic
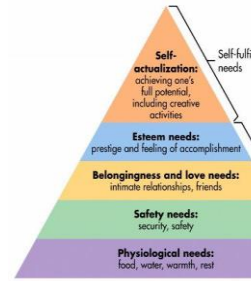
- We the People – the citizens

  – Cindy Wigglesworth

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Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

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American Values
Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*

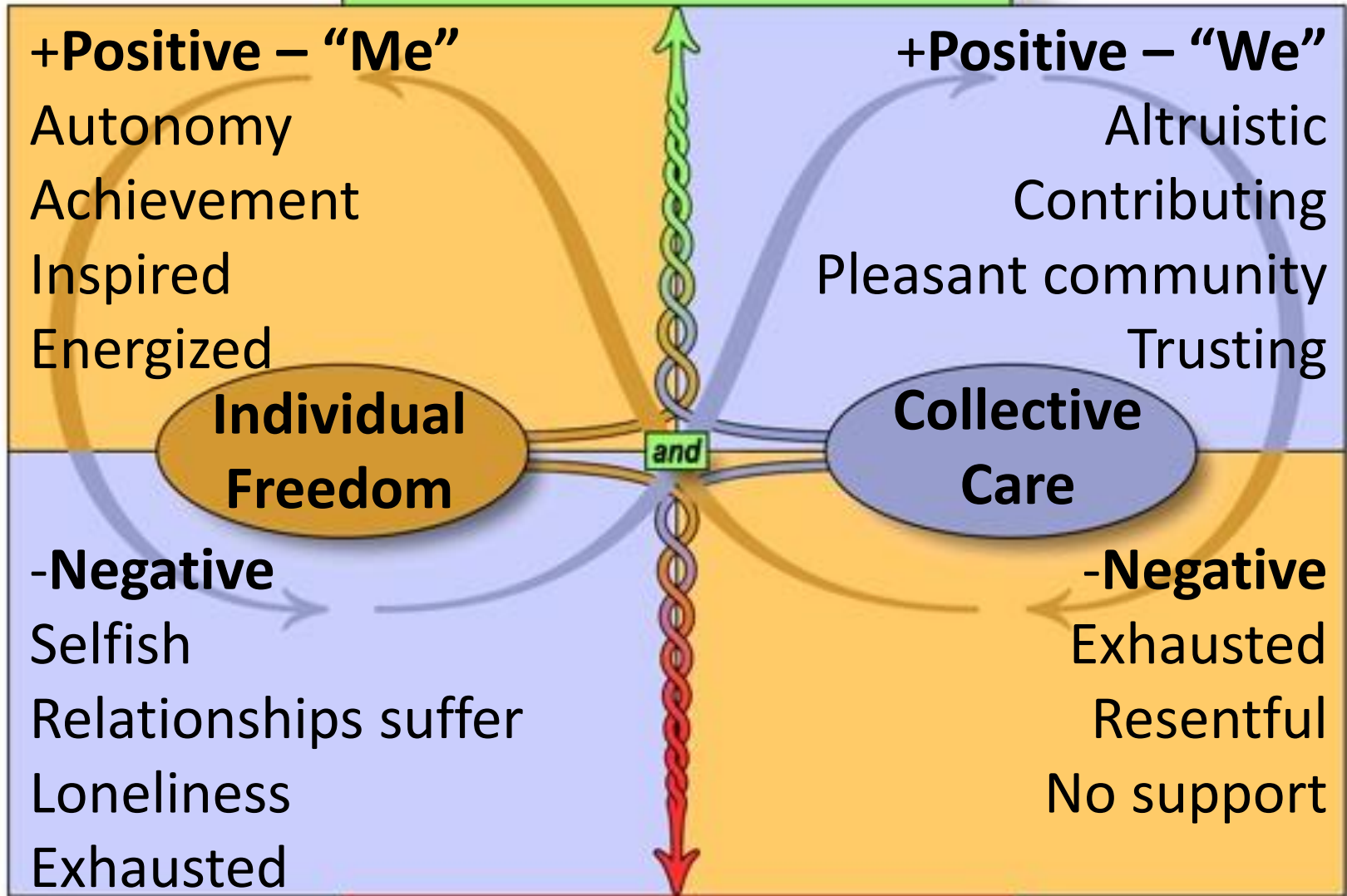| Level of Need*	American Ideals & Values	Where
Self-transcending	To grow up and contribute to the world	Avenues for human development
Aesthetic needs	To create and to be in the presence of beauty	National parks, museums, music arenas
Know & understand	To learn and grow	Access to learning and education
Self-actualizing	To achieve and express my talents	Merit-based systems encourage people to challenge themselves
Self-esteem	To feel competent in the world	Feel respected; rewarded for accomplishments
Belonging & Love	To be loved and to give love	Freedom to love whomever we love; supportive groups
Safety	To feel safe in my country & community	Justice is fair and equal; police & military
Physiological	To be alive & to live	$, food, water, shelter, health(care)

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Examples of Political Polarities

My rights & Our rights

Individual autonomy & Collective responsibility

Stability & Change

Independence & Regulation

Freedom & Opportunity

Decentralize & Centralize

Hierarchy & Consensus

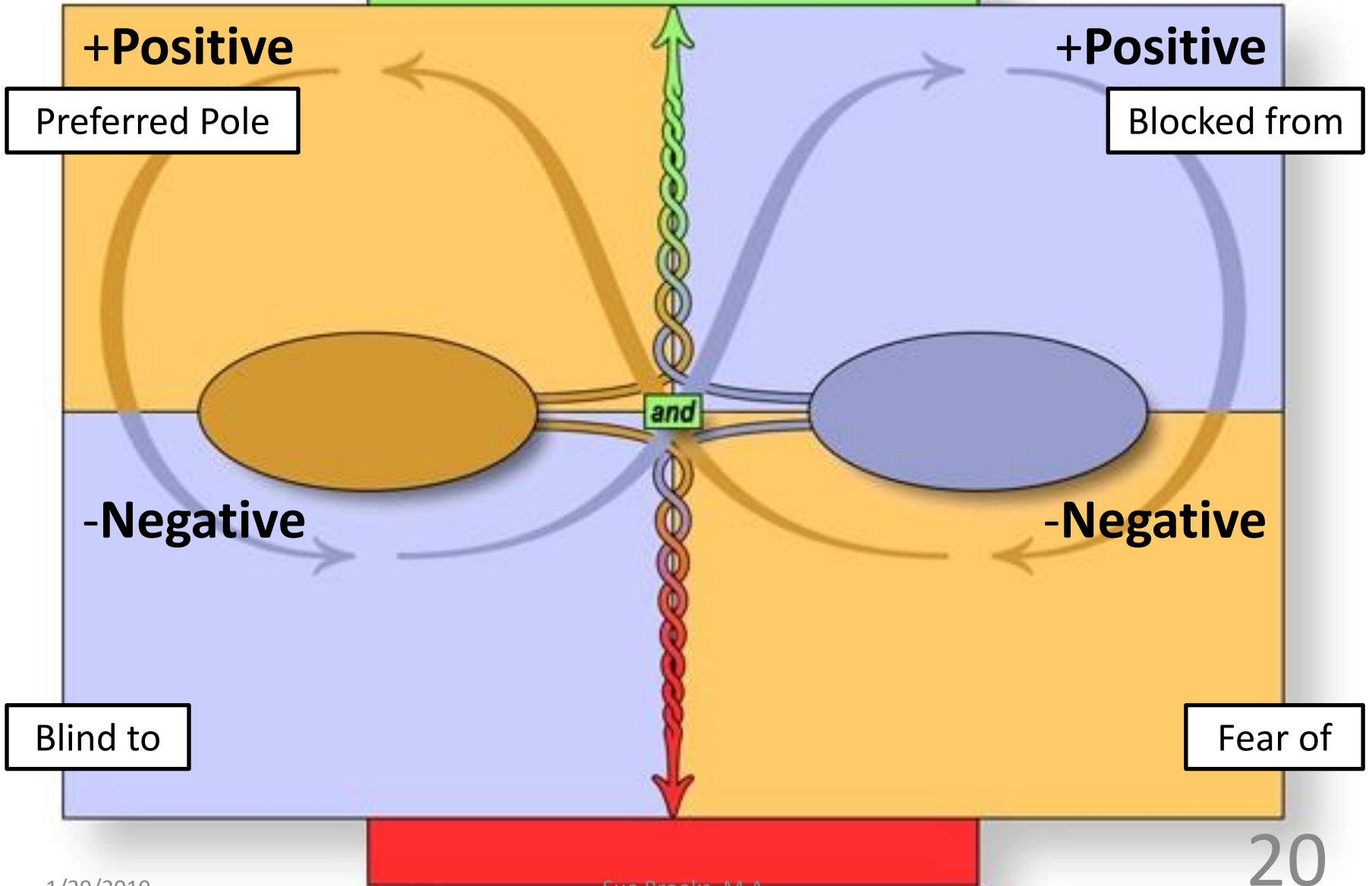Hard power - military & Soft power - diplomacy
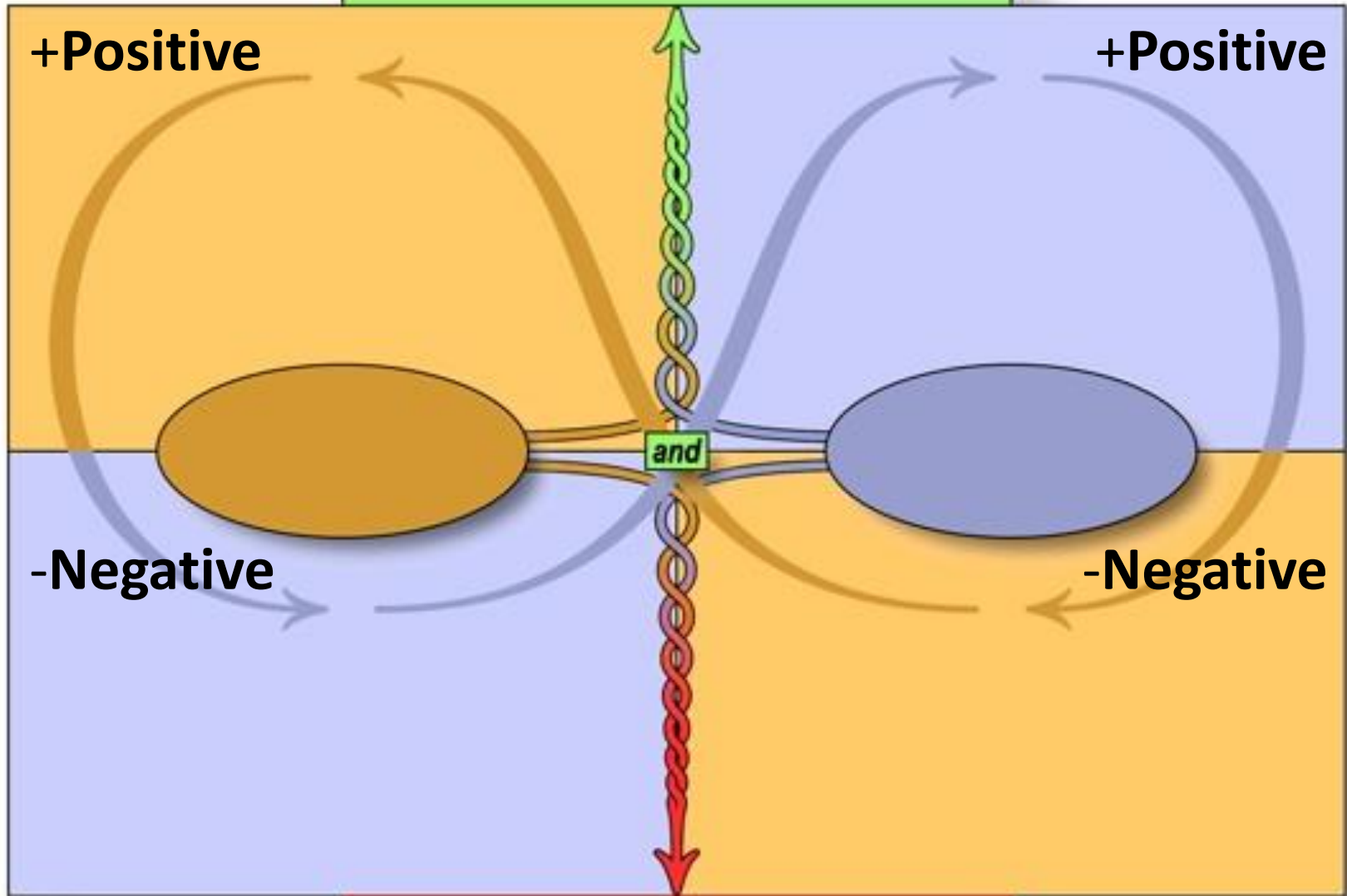
Polarity Management® Map

Goal – Ideal America

+Positive – "Me"
Autonomy
Achievement
Inspired
Energized

Individual Freedom

+Positive – "We"
Altruistic
Contributing
Pleasant community
Trusting

Collective Care

and

-Negative
Selfish
Relationships suffer
Loneliness
Exhausted

-Negative
Exhausted
Resentful
No support

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Polarity Management® Map

Goal – North Pole

+Positive

Preferred Pole

+Positive

Blocked from

and

-Negative

-Negative

Blind to

Fear of

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Polarity Management® Map

Goal – North Pole

+Positive   +Positive

and

-Negative   -Negative

Harvard Business Review

- Step 1: Define exactly the change you want to see
  - **Manageable Polarity or Solvable Problem?**
- Step 2: Shift the spectrum of allies
  - **Synergistic**
- Step 3: Identify the pillars of power
  - **More people participating**
- Step 4: Seek to attract, not to overpower
  - **Allies**
- Step 5: Build a plan to survive victory

How Protests Become Successful Social Movements, 1/27/17,
https://hbr.org/2017/01/how-protests-become-successful-social-movements

Getting Unstuck

- Stay focused on the North Pole – the goal
- Understand *flow*
- Use your *own* fear & resistance
- Validate, validate, validate
  - "That sounds really important to you."

References

- Polarity Management – Identifying & Managing Unsolvable Problems, by Barry Johnson
  - Business
- Necessary Wisdom – Meeting the Challenge of a New Cultural Maturity, by Charles Johnston
  - Includes spirituality; fallacies & bridges
- Managing Polarities in Congregations – 8 Keys for Thriving Faith Communities, by Roy M. Oswald and Barry Johnson

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