

The Love Model

I propose that society consider defining mental health as the extent to which one may effectively express love. Under this mental health model (I'll call it the Love Model), a great deal of meaning and understanding can be brought to bear in common conceptions of mental illness as well as in navigation in a mental person's journey.

For example, doesn't it make sense to classify Hitler as a mentally unhealthy individual? Current definitions of mental health, such as those emphasizing the balance between one's social, physical, spiritual, and emotional life aspects, are flawed in that they don't distinguish between a balance that leads to a happy outcome-- expressions of love and kindness--and those that end in dysfunction. Hitler's "balance" resulted in great dysfunction and disease on a woeful scale. The killing of millions of Jews is an example.

A clinical mention of Jesus Christ is also warranted. While it is true that Jesus appears to have been killed most savagely for his words and deeds, this is really a very funny irony given that Jesus is likely to have been among the mentally healthiest and most successful people ever to be recorded. As proof there exists the love effectively expressed by Jesus and carried through the pages in the Bible for two millennia.

This love can inform us every step of the way as we negotiate a mental life. Are we not eating, for example? If such is the case, we will not be able to effectively express love and hence lose our mental health. Are we punching at people? Again looking at the Love Model, we see that punching is not an expression of love hence we are not in such a case mentally healthy.

Is this Love Model easy to understand? I believe it is easier to grasp on an intuitive level than other conceptions. Is it superior? It may have some challenges in that it appears to be quite simplistic and malleable. For example, suppose an individual asserts that romantic love of a "hypersexual nature" is his reason for existence and his hypersexual expression is proof of his or her mental health. In such a case, we might be compelled to counter philosophically

with arguments concerning the importance of balance among the various kinds of love in maintaining some level of happy moderation.

It should be noted, though, that in perpetually warning against excess we are offering sound advice from a stoic philosophical perspective, traditional religious perspective, and prevailing contemporary medical perspective. In other words, I believe we have a firm backdrop with respect to this particular vulnerability.

Strengths of the Love Model might include malleability and flexibility, for I feel we need breathing room in our understanding of love and what constitutes an effective expression of love. Love for one culture is often different than love in another culture. What we must have, though, is some sort of agenda or goal or direction to our mental life in order for us to advance.

Mere clinicality doesn't cut it. Imagine visiting an alien planet much like earth and happening upon a dictionary. Curious as to the alien culture, you look up the word "tree." The definition states "vertical object." Yes, it is true that trees are usually oriented in a vertical direction. But would you not feel that the alien race had missed some important ecological information in its description? This is the way I feel about our current conceptions of mental health in terms such as "balance."

Let's put some "oomph" in our conceptions of mental health, be it in the Love Model or other models, so we can tell that a character like Hitler was sick and a character like Jesus was well.

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