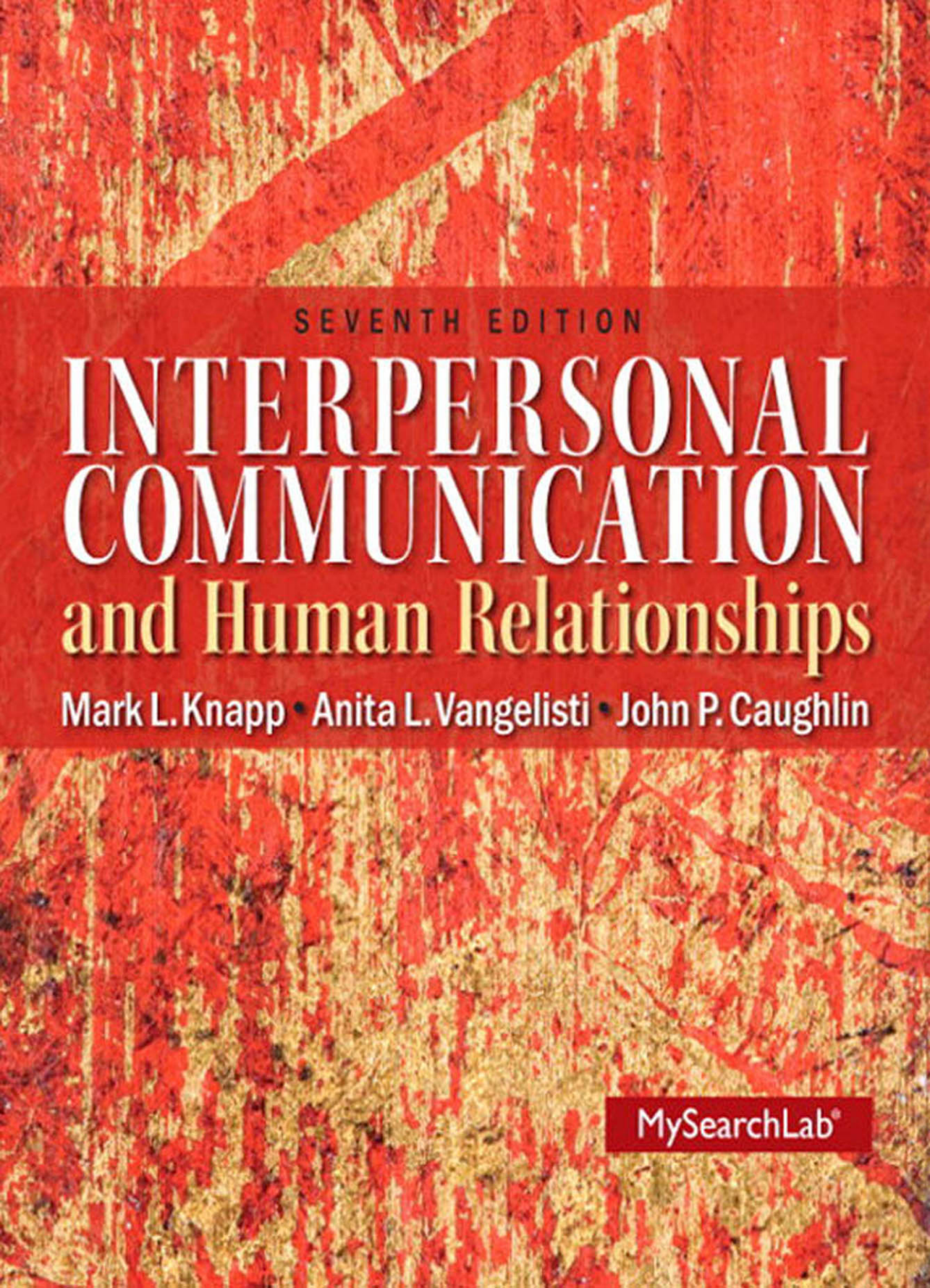
SEVENTH EDITION
INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION
and Human Relationships
Mark L. Knapp • Anita L. Vangelisti • John P. Caughlin
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Seventh Edition

Interpersonal Communication and Human Relationships

Mark L. Knapp
University of Texas at Austin

Anita L. Vangelisti
University of Texas at Austin

John P. Caughlin
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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Once a human being has arrived on this earth, *communication is the largest single factor determining what kinds of relationships she or he makes with others and what happens to each in the world.* How we manage survival, how we develop intimacy, how productive we are, how we make sense, how we connect with our own divinity—all depend largely on our communication skills.

Virginia Satir
The New Peoplemaking

Contents

Preface vii

Part I *Human Communication in Developing Relationships* 1

1 Communication: The Lifeblood of Relationships 2
Relationship Messages 4
Five Important Misconceptions About Communication in Relationships 8
How Communication Changes as Our Relationships Develop 13
Dimensions of Communication: Patterns and Variations 19
Summary 24 • *Selected Readings* 25 • *Notes* 28

2 Stages of Coming Together and Coming Apart 30
Types of Relationships 31
A Model of Interaction Stages in Relationships 33
Interaction Stages 38
Movement: In, Out, and Around Stages 47
Summary 60 • *Selected Readings* 61 • *Notes* 65

Part II *Factors Affecting Human Communication Behavior in Relationships* 69

3 The Nature of the Communicators 70
The Influence of Interpersonal Needs 71
The Role of Interpersonal Needs 76
Analyzing Our Own Needs and Those of Others 78
Interpersonal Needs Across the Lifespan 80
Interpersonal Needs of Females and Males 90
Summary 94 • *Selected Readings* 95 • *Notes* 99

4 The Communication Environment: Cultural and Physical 104
The Influence of the Cultural Environment 106
The Influence of the Immediate Physical Environment or Setting 118

The Influence of New Media and Communication Technologies 126
Summary 133 • Selected Readings 135 • Notes 137

Part III *Interaction Patterns for Coming Together 145*

5 The Genesis of Dialogue 146
Getting Together 147
Sizing Up the Other Person 151
The Many Faces of Attraction 164
Summary 174 • Selected Readings 175 • Notes 177

6 Interaction Rituals 183
Communication Rules 184
The Rhetoric of Hello 192
Forms of Address 196
Relationship "Openers" 200
Small(?) Talk 205
Summary 213 • Selected Readings 214 • Notes 217

7 The Foundations of Intimate Dialogue 222
Types of Love 224
Liking Versus Loving 230
Love Versus Friendship 232
Intimacy and Close Relationships 235
Foundations of Intimacy 238
Summary 252 • Selected Readings 253 • Notes 255

Part IV *Interaction Patterns and the Maintenance of Relationships 259*

8 Maintaining Relationships Through Dialogue: Disclosures, Lies, and Fights 260
Relationship Maintenance 261
Self-Disclosure, Confidentiality, and Trust 262
Lying 271
Constructive Conflict 278
Summary 291 • Selected Readings 292 • Notes 297

9 Maintaining Relationships Through Dialogue: Commitment and Intimacy 301
Commitment and Commitment Talk 302
Personal Idioms 311
Giving Compliments and Gifts 314

Giving Comfort and Advice 316
Persuasion 318
Sex Talk 322
Intimate Play 325
Intimacy Without Words 326
Summary 331 • *Selected Readings* 333 • *Notes* 337

Part V *Interaction Patterns for Coming Apart* 341

10 Communication and the Process of Relationship Disengagement 342
Terminating Relationships 343
Communication During Relationship Decay: Return of the Stranger 357
Summary 365 • *Selected Readings* 366 • *Notes* 368

11 The Dialogue of Distance and De-escalation 373
Some Potentially Destructive Patterns of Communication: An Interpersonal Chamber of Horrors 375
Summary 399 • *Selected Readings* 400 • *Notes* 403

Part VI *Toward More Effective Communication in Relationships* 407

12 Evaluating and Developing Effective Communication in Relationships 408
The Relativity of Effective Communication 411
Perceptions of Effective Communication 419
Rx for Effective Communication 421
Becoming an Effective Communicator 428
Writing Your Own Story 432
Communicating Effectively Together 433
Summary 435 • *Selected Readings* 436 • *Notes* 439

Author Index 442

Subject Index 452

Preface

This is a book about interpersonal communication—with all the standard topics like perception, conflict, verbal and nonverbal behavior, and so on covered. But there is one big difference in this book and most other books on interpersonal communication. All the processes and principles of interpersonal communication are discussed in the context of developing relationships. So it is also a book about the way people communicate in relationships as they come together and come apart. We adopted this approach for two reasons: (1) There seems to be a widespread concern in this country and abroad for understanding the forces that bring people together and keep them together and those that divide and separate them; (2) students of human communication find concepts and principles easier to learn when they can analyze and test them in the context of common experiences. Whether it is with our roommates, our romantic partners, or our parents, we are constantly experiencing how communication behavior affects our relationships. It is within the context of our relationships with others that abstract concepts like feedback, perception, and conflict resolution become increasingly relevant and important for students of communication.

The book is divided into six parts. The first part has two objectives: (1) to identify several important patterns of communication and (2) to show how these patterns of communication manifest themselves at different stages of a relationship. Part II shows how the characteristics of each individual (e.g., gender, age, needs) and the characteristics of the environment where the relationship develops can affect the way we communicate. The three chapters constituting Part III discuss various communication patterns in the context of relationships that are moving toward increased intimacy or closeness. Part IV examines a number of communication patterns that partners perceive as crucial to the adequate maintenance of relationships. And Part V takes a look at communication patterns in the context of relationships that are moving toward less intimacy. Although the concept of effective communication behavior is implicit in the preceding chapters, the last part of the book explicitly examines the subject. We believe that any discussion of how to be an effective communicator makes more sense if preceded by chapters detailing the variety of communicative goals and activities that characterize our relationships.

The chapter order was designed to emphasize the developmental theme of the book rather than to suggest a rigid chronology to our communication behavior in relationship development. Greeting behavior, as Chapter 6 points out, takes place between friends *and* enemies even though the discussion of greeting behavior is placed in the section labeled "coming together." Similarly, lying is not a type of behavior found only in the maintenance of relationships even though it is discussed in that section of the book. Further, it should be noted that the terms *growth* and *decay* are meant to be descriptive rather than evaluative.

In other words, relationship "growth" is not inherently "good" and relationship "decay" inherently "bad." Positive and negative consequences can accrue from either process.

The concepts presented in this book were not originally designed for generalization beyond our contemporary U.S. culture, but future explorations may uncover some extensions to other cultural contexts.[1] It is clear that each culture imposes slightly different rules on the development and deterioration of relationships—parental selection of potential marriage partners, prohibition of intimate same-sex relationships, severe sanctioning of the termination of marriages, and so on. It is equally clear that specific behaviors utilized to accomplish interpersonal goals may differ greatly from culture to culture. Compare these greeting rituals with your own:

> An Ainu, meeting his sister, grasped her hands in his for a few seconds, suddenly released his hold, grasped her by both ears and gave the peculiar Ainu greeting cry; then they stroked one another down the face and shoulders.... Adamanese greet one another by one sitting down in the lap of the other, arms around each other's necks and weeping for a while.... At Matavai a full dress greeting after long absence requires scratching the head and temples with a shark's tooth, violently and with much bleeding.[2]

Or consider these friendship rituals:

> To celebrate friendship in other parts of western Africa, men throw excrement at each other and comment loudly on the genitals of their respective parents when they meet; this behavior, perhaps unnatural and obscene to us, is a proof of love to friends. In Tanzania, if a man meets a woman who is his special friend, he has the right to insult her and playfully pummel her like a punching bag.[3]

Obviously, such displays are not typical among friends in U.S. culture and likely would be considered abusive. Yet, although the behaviors used to achieve the goal of initiating contact or showing friendship with others may differ dramatically, the functions served by these behaviors and the ends sought may have some cultural overlap.

This book contains a preponderance of examples from male–female relationships and relationships in which people "voluntarily" seek contact with, or disengagement from, one another. While such examples came to us easier and seemed most understandable for readers, the interaction stages outlined in the book are not limited to these applications. Romantic partners and tennis buddies have gone through the same stages; the romantic partners have simply gone further. Business partners and sorority sisters find different topics, but both engage in a lot of small talk. All people drawn into, or pulled out of, relationships by forces outside their control will like that occurrence or not like it and communicate accordingly. For instance, a child's relationship with his

[1]See, for example, R. Goodwin, *Personal Relationships Across Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 1999) and S. O. Gaines, Jr. and J. H. Liu, "Multicultural/Multiracial Relationships." In C. Hendrick and S. S. Hendrick, eds., *Close Relationships: A Sourcebook* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), pp. 97–108.

[2]W. LaBarre, "Paralinguistics, Kinesics and Cultural Anthropology." In T. A. Sebeok, A. S. Hayes, and M. C. Bateson, eds., *Approaches to Semiotics* (The Hague, Mouton, 1964), p. 199.

[3]R. Brain, "Somebody Else Should Be Your Own Best Friend," *Psychology Today* 11 (October 1977): 83–84, 120, 123.

or her parent may, at some point, be very close and loving (Integrating Stage) and at another time be cold and distant (Stagnating Stage).

The "Dear Dr. Knapp," "Dear Dr. Vangelisti," and "Dear Dr. Caughlin" letters that precede each chapter are from actual letters written by students. The problems posed in these letters have been analyzed and discussed in a university class without the writer's identity being revealed. In this book the letters are used to forecast some of the issues treated in each chapter. The boxed inserts scattered through the text are designed to provide amusing and/or thought-provoking asides associated with the adjacent material. The "So You Want To Know About…" inserts provide focused information about specific topics of interest that are otherwise discussed in various places throughout the book. The Instructor's Manual (ISBN: 0205217168, available for download by instructors at pearsonhighered.com) for this edition, updated by the authors, is based on extensive classroom experience with this text. The behavioral objectives, participative exercises, and test questions should be most helpful in tailoring this text to classroom learning experiences.

This edition, like the last, was written with several expectations: (1) We hope that some readers will reflect on the ideas presented and compare them against what they have experienced and seen in others, but certainly not blindly accept everything. (2) We hope that some readers will not only reflect on the ideas in this book but will also find them challenging enough to actively initiate a lifelong process of analysis and re-analysis of their everyday communicative behavior and that of others. (3) We hope that still other readers will be stimulated to formulate testable hypotheses and submit some of the speculation and undocumented thoughts presented here to the rigors of social science research. The references at the end of each chapter will provide an appropriate initial step for determining what others have found.

New to This Edition

The most obvious addition to this version of *Interpersonal Communication and Human Relationships* is the addition of a third author, John P. Caughlin. His addition made sense because his scholarly viewpoints are congruent with the existing framework of the text and his research interests complement those of his co-authors.

Beyond the change to the roster of authors, there are more substantive changes to this edition as well. Some of these involve subtle updates that reflect the most recent scholarship, but there are also a number of new and important topics. Among others, these topics include:

- Greatly expanded coverage of social media and new communication technologies;
- Discussion of cross-sex friendships;
- Additional information about affectionate communication and health in relationships
- An explanation of the emerging consensus that being "responsive" to one's partner is a core part of what it means to have a positive intimate relationship;
- Information about the phenomenon of "on-again/off-again" relationships; and
- A thorough discussion of when people might be better off avoiding communication in their relationships.

Instructor Resources

The Instructor's Manual and Test Bank (0205217168) that accompanies Interpersonal Communication and Human Relationships has been thoroughly updated by the authors. The Instructor's Manual portion of the IM/TB includes a host of resources including sample syllabi for structuring the course, an outline for each chapter which includes the major ideas covered and notes for every major concept contained within the outline, out-of-class activities, journal assignments, and more. The Test Bank contains approximately 565 multiple-choice, true/false, and essay questions, all of which are organized by chapter. A downloadable version of this supplement is available at www.pearsonhighered.com/irc (access code required). MyTest online test generating software (ISBN 0205217133) is available at www.pearsonmytest.com (access code required). For a complete listing of the instructor and student resources available with this text, please visit the Interpersonal Communication and Human Relationships e-Catalog page at www.pearsonhighered.com.

This text is available in a variety of formats—digital and print. To learn more about our programs, pricing, and customization options, visit www.pearsonhighered.com.

Acknowledgments

This book is the happy product of authors who think and work in a similar manner. Each has a profound respect for the diverse talents of the others. Each of us has drawn on our own research and our knowledge of the now vast body of research focused on personal relationships and tried to present it in an interesting and accessible manner for students. Inevitably, our own experiences in personal relationships (good and bad) are sometimes used to illustrate and interpret ideas in the text.

Melissa Mashburn on this book and Jeanne Zalesky and Karon Bowers on previous editions were Super Editors. They have been extremely instrumental in any success this book has had. Each of us owes a great debt to John Daly, whose assistance with this book and attention to the authors has been enormous and unwavering for years.

Geoff Tumlin and Stacey Connaughton did a superior makeover of the Sixth Edition Instructor's Manual, for which we remain grateful. Trey Guinn's careful work was perfect for updating the Instructor's Manual and generating the author and subject indices. We appreciate the many thoughts and suggestions provided by the blind reviews commissioned by Pearson, and following reviewers of this current edition: Colleen M. Klatt, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute; Heidi Reeder, Boise State University; Marc Martin, San Francisco State University; Charee Mooney, University of Texas at Austin. We are also grateful to our colleagues who reviewed earlier editions of this book: Timothy Ashmore, Morehead State University; Thomas Bovino, SUNY Suffolk County; Marcia D. Dixson, Indiana University–Purdue University Fort Wayne; Joanne Gilbert, Alma College; Robin Gilmour, University of California–Santa Barbara; Rona Leber, Bossier Parish Community College; Sally Lederer, Carlson School of Management, University of Minnesota; Claude H. Miller, University of Oklahoma; Narissra Maria Punyanunt-Carter, Texas Tech University; and Marilyn Shaw, University of Northern Iowa.

Mark L. Knapp
Anita L. Vangelisti
John P. Caughlin

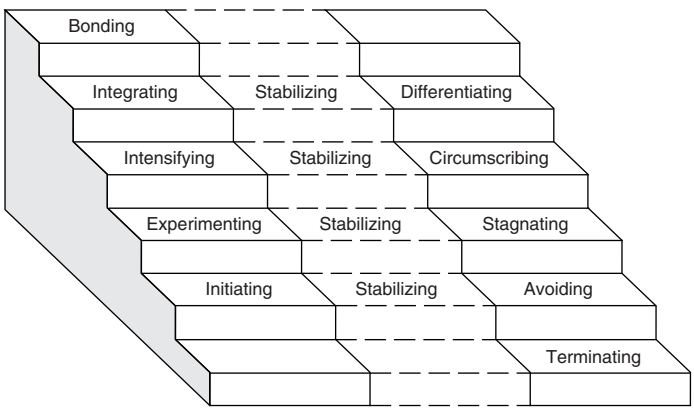
PART

I

Human Communication in Developing Relationships

CHAPTER 1
Communication: The Lifeblood of Relationships

CHAPTER 2
Stages of Coming Together and Coming Apart



CHAPTER

1

Communication: The Lifeblood of Relationships

Dear Dr. Knapp,

Why is it so difficult for people to express their true feelings to other people they are close to? My boyfriend drives me nuts sometimes because he can't seem to figure out how he feels about things. He'll say, "No, I don't think you're being too sensitive…" and think that he really believes what he's saying. But if I keep talking to him, I find that he's feeling something very different… which is what I thought in the first place! Even though he usually admits I was right not to believe what he says at first, I find this confusing and irritating. Why doesn't he know how he really feels about things? Why does he spout off and say things that aren't true? Is he afraid to express himself to me?

Bewildered and Bothered

Sometimes our communication with others is bewildering. It is the purpose of this chapter to explore some of the subtle and sometimes indirect, along with the more direct, ways we use to discuss the nature of our relationships with others. In general, then, this chapter is designed to provide the reader with some realistic expectations for the many ways we communicate with our relationship partners and how these patterns change when the relationship changes.

> *The study of everyday life quickly focuses on interpersonal communication—the sequencing of messages in conversations and the sequencing of conversations into relationships—as the primary activity in human sociation and has demonstrated that apparently simple acts of conversation are in fact incredibly complex feats which even social scientists can perform better than they can explain.*
>
> *—W. Barnett Pearce*

People meet and separate. But funny things happen in between. It's almost as if mysterious forces are pushing and pulling us—sometimes muddling our minds, sometimes captivating our souls. Abstract? Definitely. Poetry? Perhaps. The introduction to a scholarly textbook bent on demystifying human communication in developing relationships? Unlikely.

Fortunately, however, the foregoing introduction serves one rather important function. The abstract references to "things" and "mysterious forces" serve to remind all of us how frequently we avoid concrete and detailed descriptions of our own interpersonal relationships. For example, romantic partners may say: "What we have is so beautiful—to try to explain it, is to ruin it"; a divorcée might reflect: "I can't pinpoint anything specific…the relationship just wasn't making it for me anymore"; friends, too, may balk at detailed examination of their relationships: "I don't know. I just like him. Isn't that enough?"[1]

For those who study human communication, it is not enough. Such statements only raise questions: (1) Are there regular and systematic patterns of communication that suggest stages on the road to an intimate relationship? Are there similar patterns and stages that characterize the deterioration of relationships? (2) Can we identify communication strategies that attract and repel us at various stages in a relationship? Specifically, how do people talk to each other when they are building, maintaining, or tearing down a relationship? (3) What are these mysterious forces that propel us in and out of relationships? And what determines how quickly or slowly a relationship progresses or dissolves? It is the purpose of this book to seek answers to these questions.

One important issue that seems logically to precede tackling any of the aforementioned questions is the rationale for carefully scrutinizing the communication–relationship interface in the first place. Why devote an entire book to the communication behavior manifested at various stages of a relationship? Is it simply because this is a popular topic that reflects the climate of the times—surfacing in diverse sources such as the songs of Beyoncé and Katy Perry, the pages of the *Twilight* series, or the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships?* If mere popularity were the sole justification for our concern, the idea would soon be stripped of any relevance to our daily lives. Instead, we are grappling with a phenomenon that has been, and always will be, with us—one that is inherent in everything we say and do and one that reflects the very nature of human communication itself.

Relationship Messages

It is difficult, if not impossible, to think of any message sent by one person to another that does not, in some way, also carry a commentary on the relationship between the two parties. In a sense, then, each message carries information at two levels. Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson call these the *content level* and the *relationship level.*[2] To illustrate this concept, consider the following example. When I say, "Come in. Have a seat," the content indicates some rather specific behaviors to follow. However, there may also be a relationship message that combines vocal, verbal, and nonverbal cues and says, "I don't know you very well; you probably want a lot from me but won't give much in return; let's keep this brief and formal; state your business and get out; I am in control of this situation, and this is just the first of several directives I'll be issuing in the next few minutes; because of my position, I expect you to follow my orders." In short, the relationship message tells us how to interpret the content. It should also be noted that message content may carry some important relationship information. In the phrase "Get me a cup of coffee," the content itself involves one person doing something for the other and the form is a direct injunction. This may be taken by the recipient as a message indicative of a superior/subordinate relationship.[3] Regardless of their origin, relationship messages provide us with a good deal of information about how we see the other person, how we see ourselves, what kind of relationship the two of us have in this situation, what kind of relationship we have generally, or what kind of relationship is desired in the future.

What we are doing on the relationship level is sending a message about a message.[4] Sometimes we receive relationship information through the perception of nonverbal cues enacted during the verbal message—for example, a stern look, a curt voice, a warm handshake, a reduction of physical space separating the communicators. Sometimes messages are verbally altered and adapted to meet the demands of a specific relationship. A student may say, "Ok, uh, Professor Lipid. I can see you have some other students waiting to see you, so I guess I'll leave. Thanks so much for your help. I'll see you tomorrow in class." The same student would no doubt terminate his conversation with a close friend in a much different manner, "Yeah, right. Later." Sometimes we feel the necessity of metacommunicating verbally when we sense our nonverbal cues have not been sufficient. One partner in a dating pair says, "You think I'd watch an x-rated movie with *you*? You must be crazy!" This is followed by a smile, a friendly touch, and a laugh—all of which attempt to communicate, "We have such a warm and understanding relationship I can add a playful dimension and you will understand and accept it." However, if the nonverbal cues did not serve their intended purpose (either through sender or receiver error), it may be necessary for the speaker to metacommunicate by verbally stating that his or her intentions were of a "kidding" nature. This example also illustrates the confusion that incongruous verbal and nonverbal cues can cause—"Your words say you love me, but your behavior leaves considerable doubt."

Much of the time, we process relationship-level information without much conscious thought—almost automatically. On at least three occasions, though, we are keenly aware of relationship messages.

1. One such occasion occurs when the message seems to *violate drastically our expectations for the relationship* in a given situation—for example, being greeted by a stranger with a hello, a hug, and a kiss!
2. A second occasion occurs when we are involved in *relationships characterized by high levels of intensity*. Research by Knobloch, Solomon, and their colleagues, for example, shows that there are periods of *turbulence* in relationships, when reactions to relational messages are particularly strong (in both positive and negative ways). One time when a lot of couples experience a turbulent period is when they are deciding whether to transition from dating casually to more serious involvement.[5] Likewise, a couple battling the forces pulling their relationship apart will heighten their awareness for any information that threatens their two-person community. In these situations, we see a fusion of the content and relationship levels—both provide information pertaining to the relationship itself.
3. A third occasion occurs *when disagreement and conflict arise.* During such strife, the combatants may have several reactions: trying to become the sole "winner," planning strategies to be "one-up" next time and thereby recoup losses incurred from not "winning," or simply enjoying the feeling of being whipped by the other's rhetorical superiority, and so on. The following dialogue, focusing on marital conflict, serves to summarize some of the concepts outlined in the preceding paragraphs:

WIFE: Honey, you really watch too much TV.	*Although the content addresses a specific behavior, the relationship level is saying: I wish you didn't have so many things that take time and attention away from me. TV is only one minor example that happened to strike me at the moment.*
HUSBAND: I do not.	*The relationship message has been ignored completely, and the husband prepares himself for the impending battle over TV watching.*
WIFE: C'mon, honey…you do too.	*The wife feels obligated to defend her initial statement. She cannot or will not verbalize the major problem with the relationship but tries not to be too argumentative at this point. She is still hoping her husband will respond to her cues that reveal the relationship message—sitting on the arm of his chair with her arm around his shoulders.*

HUSBAND: All right, then, I won't watch any TV for a whole week, damn it!	*He is still trying to win on the content level. His kick-me-while-I'm-down strategy is clever because if she agrees, she is really a shrew—knowing what a sacrifice it would be. (The "damn it" dramatized the sacrifice.) Besides, if she agrees, he will still "win" because she will feel guilty for having caused him to be one-down—which of course puts him one-up.*
WIFE: Oh, just forget it. Do what you want.	*The wife sees the trap her husband has prepared on the content level. She gives up on the possibility of positive communication on the relationship level and removes herself from his chair and starts to leave the scene.*
HUSBAND: Forget it! How can I forget it? You come in here and make a big deal out of my TV habits. Then, to satisfy you, I agree to cut it out completely and you say, "forget it"! What's wrong with you, anyway?	*He realizes he has won on the content level and finally tunes into the relationship level—only to find negative cues. As if enjoying a relationship where he dominates, he tries to prolong his "winning" streak by urging continued argument—never realizing he is also prolonging his counterpart's losing streak.*

Now the wife assesses her marital relationship. Her husband does not pay enough attention to her; he was insensitive to her metacommunication about their relationship; he enjoys dominating her; and now he has impugned her sanity for wishing to drop an issue she raised in the first place. The forecast for the immediate future is a long, miserable argument about TV watching. The long-range forecast is a frustrated and confused husband who can't understand why his wife is leaving him, especially since the only thing they fought about was so trivial—TV watching. For illustrative clarity, this dialogue focuses our attention on the husband's response to relationship messages. Obviously, this "interaction snapshot" distorts the dynamics of the husband–wife relationship and their mutual contribution to it. We might, for instance, find a link between the husband's desire to watch TV and the wife's previous orientation to *his* relationship messages.

Thus, human communication may be affected by the existing relationship, but it will also structure the nature of any future relationship. If you are in a serious relationship, you know you must communicate a great deal of affection to your partner because that is the nature of your commitment. In the process of making these messages of affection, however, you may do one of two things, depending on how effective you are at sending or how effective your partner is at receiving: (1) you may affirm the level of your relationship or (2) you may change the level of your relationship to one of greater or lesser intimacy.

Up to this point, we have focused primarily on relationship messages communicated in the course of everyday conversation. But what about those times when people talk to each other (or third parties) directly and specifically about their relationship? What do they talk about? How do they talk in order to make sense of their relationship? Two studies that gathered information from people in a variety of relationships suggest the following:[6]

- People talk about relationships as *work*—the effort involved, the sacrifices, the energy needed, and so on.
- People talk about the *commitment* associated with relationships. This involves both the commitment necessary to begin a relationship and the commitment needed to sustain it.
- People talk about relationships as *involvement*. Involvement is reflected in such things as the time spent together, the quantity and quality of the talk, and sharing.
- People talk about their relationships as *unique* or *special*.
- People talk about relationships in terms of *manipulation*. Manipulation is the control of one's partner for one's own gains.
- People talk about relationships in terms of *consideration* and *respect*.
- People talk about their relationships as a developing *journey of discovery*.
- People talk about their relationships as a *game*.
- People talk about their relationships as *risky* and *potentially dangerous*.
- People talk about their relationships as *uncontrollable forces*.
- People talk about their relationships as a system of *bargaining* and *trade-offs*.

Obviously, different types of relationships will emphasize different themes. And sometimes the interaction will focus on the lack of these factors as well as their presence.

The *involvement* theme seems to be an overriding issue for relationships.[7] In one study of fifty-two married couples who were asked to discuss with each other a list of common problems facing married couples, the content of these conversations included *communal themes* (togetherness, interdependence), *individual themes* (emphasizing separate identities and roles), and *impersonal themes* (factors/forces outside the marriage that are believed responsible for shaping it). The couples who manifested more communal themes tended to report a greater satisfaction with their relationship than those who exhibited more individual themes.[8]

In addition to helping us understand the content of couples' talk about their relationships, this study identifies another important feature of interaction—namely, how the two partners combine their efforts as they discuss the content of their relationship. Thus, no matter what content was being discussed, the couples were also communicating a message about their relationship by *how* they interacted.

Five Important Misconceptions About Communication in Relationships

Even under the best conditions, communicating effectively in human relationships can be difficult. Even when we try very hard, effective communication may elude us. Sometimes these problems are associated with rigid and inappropriate assumptions about the nature of communication in relationships.

1. The Assumption of Consistency ("But that's not what you said yesterday.") Having *others* "be consistent" is highly valued in this society. It should be. It helps us make useful predictions about others so that we can adopt appropriate attitudes and behavior toward them. It is understandable, then, that seeming inconsistencies in others receive far less support than those we perceive in ourselves. On the other hand, we want to be able to change our *own* opinion or behavior, to be both independent and dependent, to be a person who is both stingy and generous, to be fully committed to cohabitation with somebody but also wanting time alone and to be a "take-charge" person in some things at some times and a willing "follower" on other occasions. And we really like people who understand this. Even though we value consistency in others, we rarely thank someone for pointing out a seeming inconsistency in our own behavior.

One of the reasons we aren't very receptive to another's accusations of inconsistency is that we may not perceive our behavior as inconsistent. Inconsistency and consistency are in the eye and ear of the beholder. For example, within fifteen minutes a wife makes these statements to her husband: "You spend too much money" and "You don't ever take me out to a nice restaurant anymore." The husband may perceive these as inconsistent—thinking he would have to spend money to take his wife out to dinner. The wife does not see the inconsistency because she is talking about his *personal* spending, not spending for their *mutual* benefit. In addition, to the wife the importance of going out together far supersedes the importance of spending money. Much of what we say omits important personal reservations that listeners would do well to explore before charging the person with inconsistency.

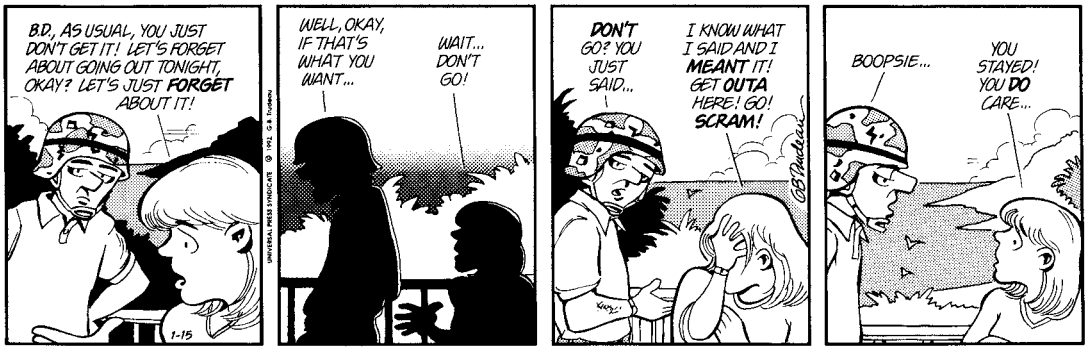
We should expect relationship messages to exhibit both consistency and inconsistency. The so-called "ideal" relationship does not manifest a continual stream of supportive messages. Ideal relationships are those in which the participants understand and appreciate the necessity of both positive and negative messages. Those with less tolerance for seemingly inconsistent behavior may have more trouble maintaining a wide variety of relationships. This intolerance for inconsistency may be especially troublesome in more enduring relationships because we often tend to emphasize our consistency first and reveal contrariety later.

Why do these seeming inconsistencies occur? Life situations and communication contexts change. You may want to be "wild and crazy" at the party and "quiet and conservative" at home; you may find frequent conversations on the topic of sex rewarding at one point in your life and boring at another. If we assume a person is "always like

that" or "always will be like that," we run a high risk of being wrong. We may like somebody more than anyone we know but not want to marry him or her; we may love somebody more than anyone else but vehemently dislike something about him or her. While some may wish to view such behavior as "inconsistent," it is more productively viewed as natural—reflecting the continual unfolding and complexity of each human being. When it seems to occur, it may be a valuable opportunity for learning more about the other person and your relationship rather than a time for trying to straighten out what will never be straight.

2. The Assumption of Simple Meaning ("Well, you said it so you must have meant it!") Most of us are taught to pay attention to what is said—the words. Words do provide us with some information, but meanings are derived from so many other sources that it would hinder our effectiveness as a partner to a relationship to rely too heavily on words alone. Words are used to describe only a small part of the many ideas we associate with any given message. Sometimes we can gain insight into some of those associations if we listen for more than words. We don't always say what we mean or mean what we say. Sometimes our words don't mean anything except "I'm letting off some steam. I don't really want you to pay close attention to what I'm saying. Just pay attention to what I'm feeling." Mostly we mean several things at once.

A woman says to the guy she's been dating, "I really like you, but I wish you weren't so messy. I couldn't live in a place that looks like your dorm room." The guy replies, "I've always been like this." Actually, he hasn't always been messy. When he lived at home, his parents wouldn't let him be messy, but the unspoken message is, "I don't have a problem with my messiness. Why can't you be more accepting of how I am instead of trying to change me? Besides, who asked you to live with me?" The search for a more expansive view of meaning can be developed by examining a message in terms of *who* said it, *when* it occurred, the *related conditions* or situation, and *how* it was said.



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