
INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

CHAPTER 7



TODAY'S AGENDA

- Stages of relationship development
- Relational maintenance
- Relational dialectics theory
- **Freebie Exam Question!**

The way we communicate with others and with ourselves ultimately determines the quality of our lives.

Anthony Robbins

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INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION DEFINED

Interpersonal communication =

- A social **process** in which “people who have established a communicative relationship **exchange messages** in an **effort** to generate **shared meanings** and **accomplish social goals**” (Burleson, 2010, p. 151).
- The recipient recognizes the source’s **intention** to convey a message, and the source recognizes the recipient’s **intention** to interpret.

RELATIONSHIP INITIATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Individual factors

- Romantic beliefs
- Age
- Past relationship experience
- Family experiences

Contextual factors

- Media and societal messages about romantic relationships
- Proximity to available partners

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STAGES OF RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT:

- Initiating stage
- Experimenting stage
- Intensifying stage
- Integrating stage
- Bonding stage



INITIATING STAGE

- Typically the first stage
- **Initiating** communication
 - Nonverbal behaviors often precede verbal interaction (e.g., smiling, making eye contact, etc.)
- Verbal comm is highly scripted (e.g., “Nice to meet you,” “Hi, my name is Shane”)
- **Flirting!**



EXPERIMENTING STAGE

- Commonly follows the initiating stage
- Getting to know one another, often through self-disclosure
- **Social Penetration Theory** (Altman & Taylor) – gradually peeling the outer layers and getting to the “inner core” after time
 - Scripted small talk to learn about background and interests (e.g., “Where are you from?”, “Do you like to hike?”)

EXPERIMENTING STAGE

- Allows people to “explore” one another without the risk of significant disclosures
- Most people do not move beyond the experimenting stage
 - Finding out that a person is NOT relationship material is highly informative
 - People remain friends or the relationship becomes something less

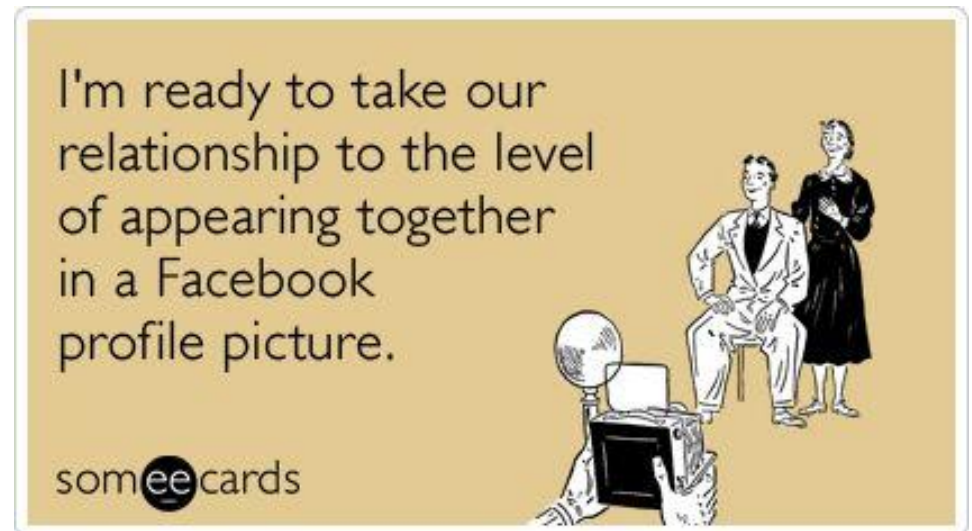
INTENSIFYING STAGE

- When couples respond positively to the experimenting stage, they begin to **intensify** their relationship
- Self-disclosing more personal information and values
- Expressing emotional and physical affection for one another
- Expressing commitment



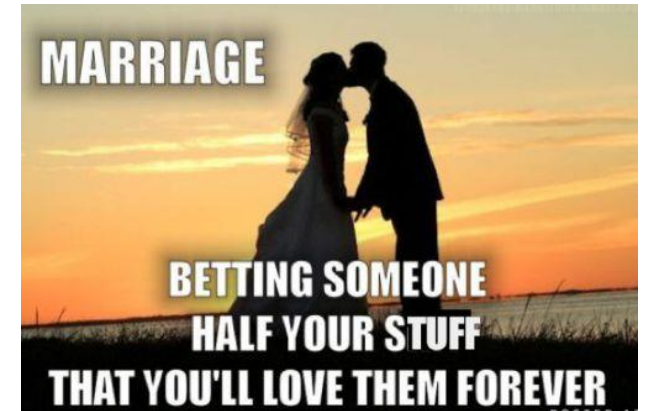
INTEGRATING STAGE

- Couples begin to use “we” (shared relational identity)
- Plan their schedules around each other
 - May fuse their social networks and their interests
- Others view them as a couple
 - **“Tie-signs”**
 - **Facebook official!**
- First big fight



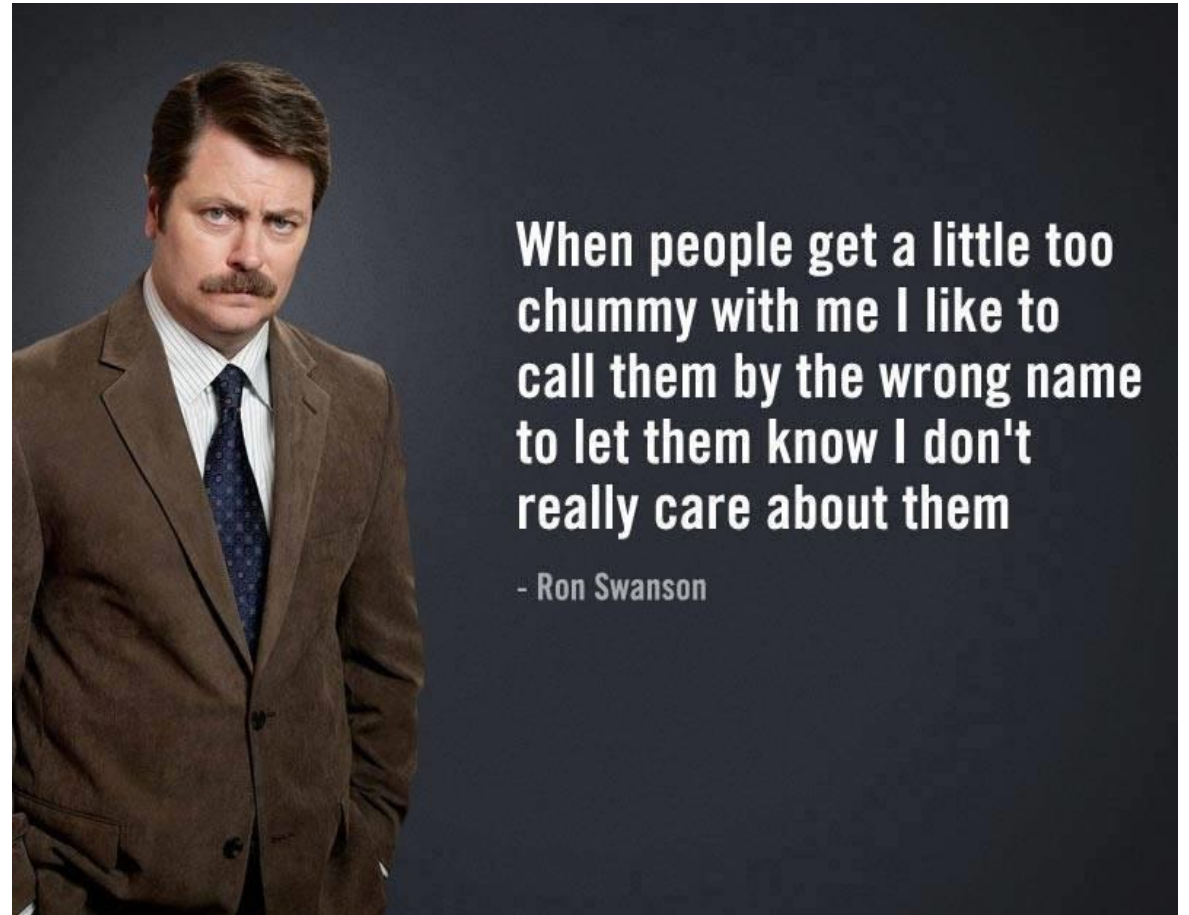
BONDING STAGE

- Publically formalizing the union
- Engagement, marriage, commitment ceremony
- Public ceremonies garner social and legal support for the relationship
 - Serve as a relational, moral, and legal contract between the partners
- Bonded relationships are the most difficult to exit



STAGES OF RELATIONSHIP DISSOLUTION:

- Differentiating stage
- Circumscribing stage
- Stagnating stage
- Avoiding stage
- Terminating stage



STAGES OF RELATIONSHIP DISSOLUTION:

■ Differentiating stage

- Start doing things separately; “me” instead of “we”

■ Circumscribing stage

- Communication diminishes; may try to talk about relationship to return to a positive state

■ Stagnating stage

- Going through the motions; avoid talking about relationship problems; others start to notice something is off.

STAGES OF RELATIONSHIP DISSOLUTION:

■ **Avoiding stage**

- May physically separate themselves; reduce opportunities for discussion; fight and flight.

■ **Terminating stage**

- Declare end to relationship (divorce, break up); sometimes terminating comes naturally (friends drifting)

THE RELATIONSHIP BANK ACCOUNT

- **Discussion question:** How are interactions in a romantic relationship like managing a balance in a bank account?



THE RELATIONSHIP BANK ACCOUNT

Couples should strive to keep a “positive balance” in their relationship bank account

- **Deposits** = positive relational behaviors (affection, intimacy, compliments, agreements)
- **Withdrawals** = negative relational behaviors (put downs, criticisms, defensiveness)
- **5:1 ratio of positivity to negativity** (Gottman)

You have made too many withdrawals and not enough deposits in this relationship so I am closing my account.



someecards
user card

RELATIONSHIP MAINTENANCE

- We *communicatively maintain* our relationships on a daily basis through our everyday interactions and behaviors
- **Relational maintenance** refers to the “huge area where relationships continue to exist *between the point of their initial development and their possible decline*” (Duck).

RELATIONSHIP MAINTENANCE

- **Relational maintenance** involves keeping a relationship:
 - In existence
 - In a state of connectedness
 - In a satisfactory condition
 - In repair

RELATIONSHIP MAINTENANCE BEHAVIORS

1. **Positivity** (upbeat & cheerful; positive demeanor)
2. **Understanding** (not judging; offering forgiveness/an apology)
3. **Self-disclosure** (sharing thoughts and feelings)
4. **Assurances** (showing how much partner means to you; talking about future)
5. **Tasks** (helping with household tasks & responsibilities)
6. **Social networks** (relying on joint family and/or friend network)
7. ****Relational talk** (discussing the quality or state of relationship)

RELATIONSHIP MAINTENANCE (ADDITIONAL THEMES)

- **Fostering intimacy**
- **Positive affectivity**
- **Constructively managing conflict**
 - Initiate conflict in gentle ways
 - De-escalate negativity
 - Use good problem-solving skills
 - Use the respect approach (and know when to gracefully get out of the relationship)

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RELATIONAL DIALECTICS THEORY



CONTRADICTION

- **Contradiction** = dynamic interplay between contrary or opposing tendencies
 - “Unified oppositions” (Baxter)
- A contradiction is formed whenever two tendencies or forces are interdependent (i.e., unified), **yet at the same time** they mutually negate (i.e., resist or oppose) one another

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CONNECTION **VS** AUTONOMY

- Refers to our simultaneous desires to be both independent of our significant others and to find intimacy with them.
 - Individual identities are important, but some individual identity must be sacrificed for the relationship to work
- RDT on FRIENDS

NOVELTY **VS** PREDICTABILITY

- Refers to our simultaneous desires for both the comfort of stability and the excitement of change.
 - Also called: **certainty vs. uncertainty**

OPENNESS VS PROTECTION

- Focuses on our conflicting desires to be both open with our relational partners and to be strategic and protective in our communication.
- A person's need to disclose to their relational partner is countered by their need for secrecy/privacy.

