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7

Understanding Relationships

**AFTER COMPLETING THIS CHAPTER,
YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO:**

- 7.1 Describe the functions relationships serve together with the needs they fulfill.
- 7.2 Discuss the role of conversation in relationships.
- 7.3 Explain the significance of depth and breadth in relationships.
- 7.4 Analyze relationships according to their stages, digital media influences, cost-benefit/social exchange implications, and relationship dialectics.
- 7.5 Explain how deception and trust affect relationships.
- 7.6 Describe laughter's role in relationships.
- 7.7 Explain how gender influences relationship formation, maintenance, and termination.
- 7.8 Explain how culture influences relationship formation, maintenance, and termination.
- 7.9 Discuss technology's impact on relationships.
- 7.10 Apply skills to improve the effectiveness of relationships.

When you start out with someone, you're essentially driving a strange car for the first time, and none of the controls are labeled.

Jerry Seinfeld

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The Bachelor, *The Bachelorette*, and *Bachelor in Paradise* feature men and women who, in exchange for celebrity, money, and/or the hope of finding that “special someone,” permit us to observe them in action from their very first face-to-face meeting with a potential partner to the relationship’s natural or unnatural outcome. Over succeeding weeks, we bear witness to “case studies” in relationship dynamics, as the participants decide to whom they’re attracted and make decisions regarding which relationships they want to develop further and which they choose to end. By the last episode, the bachelor or bachelorette is left with but a single potential life partner.

Why do *Bachelor*-type reality shows receive such high ratings? Could it be because we enjoy the voyeur experience, watching and eavesdropping as people converse, reflect on, and express their feelings when beginning relationships, negotiating their ground rules, and deciding whether a relationship should continue? Or is it that relationships

are the primary content of our social lives, and we hope that, by viewing and vicariously experiencing others' relationships, we will profit from their experiences and end up making wiser relationship choices for ourselves? Whatever your answer, for most of us, nothing is more consequential than our interpersonal relationships. ■

WHAT IS AN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP?

An **interpersonal relationship** is a meaningful dyadic connection in which two once independent people, to varying degrees, become interdependent, engaging in communication by exchanging information of a more or less personal nature, developing a shared history, and responding to each other's needs. By definition, a relationship dyad is indivisible. During our life span, we share a multitude of personal and professional relationships, some more complicated, meaningful, and/or important to us than others. A number of these relationships will succeed and last for years, perhaps even a lifetime. Others will be short-lived or fail totally. What makes the difference? If your answer is communication, you are right! Communication is the largest single factor affecting all of our relationships.¹

In this chapter, we explore the nature of our relationships, how satisfied we are with them, and steps we can take to improve their outcomes.

WHY RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

How important are your existing relationships? Why are they important? Let's find out.

We Need Connections

We humans need personal connections. In fact, having effective relationships positively affects mortality.² People devoid of meaningful relationships are more likely to fall ill and die. Social isolation compromises the immune system and weakens physical and psychological resilience—whether or not people enjoy being alone.³

Relationships Fulfill Different Ends

Whether we connect digitally or face-to-face, the relationships we form fulfill different ends. For instance, a relationship makes different demands on us depending on its context, that is, whether we are in a doctor–patient, professor–student, work, friendship, or romantic relationship. Unique communication patterns also differentiate one relationship from another. Some, such as therapist–patient or employer–employee, depend on our being able to coordinate action with another person so that we are able to solve a problem or complete a task or project. Others are social and provide us friendship or intimacy, thereby helping us to avoid feeling socially isolated or lonely. Some relationships are impersonal and brief, as when we encounter a clerk in a store or chat with another person when in line for a movie. Such brief

relationships have little, if any history, and demand little personal involvement. Other relationships are more personal and longer lasting, as are the relationships we have with some family members, friends, coworkers, and significant others.

So, whereas some relationships are purely professional, we invest the most effort in our longer-term, more personal relationships.



SKILL BUILDER

A Self-Assessment of My Relationships

Make two lists of relationships. On the first list, identify all the interpersonal relationships in which you have participated during the past month that you consider successful and likely to endure for at least another five years. On the second list, identify those interpersonal relationships you experienced during the same time period that either have already ended or that you expect not to last much longer.

1. Identify characteristics of the relationships on your two lists that contributed to their survival, demise, or uncertainty.
2. Explain what the identified characteristics tell you about the qualities necessary to sustain a relationship?
3. Which of the relationships on your first list do you consider most important? What makes you value these relationships more than the others?

RELATIONSHIPS MEET NEEDS

According to theorist William Schutz, we meet our needs for inclusion, control, and affection through friendships, work, and romantic relationships.⁴ Schutz's theory, **Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation**, highlights these three needs and offers insights into the reasons we decide to initiate, maintain, or end a relationship.

The Need for Inclusion

Inclusion has to do with the varying degrees to which we all need to establish and maintain feelings of mutual connection with other people—a sense that we take an interest in others, and they take an interest in us. We want others to pay attention to us, to take time to understand us. Wanting to be included is normal. Each of us can recall how it feels to be left out—to be the last person asked to join a team, to not be invited to an important party, to be ignored during an online conversation, or to be omitted from a Facebook photo. When such things happen, we suffer from FOMO—fear of having missed out. When our inclusion

need is satisfied, we tend to feel worthwhile and fulfilled. When it goes unmet, however, we experience feelings of loneliness, and our health may even decline.

What exactly is loneliness? **Loneliness** is an all too common affliction of the 21st century.⁵ We often don't know the names of our neighbors, and although we may have oodles of friends or followers on various social networking sites, we likely don't know many of them personally. Loneliness begins with a recognition that the interpersonal relationships we do have are not the kinds we want.⁶ It causes us to think that our friends and loved ones don't care enough about us.⁷ Interestingly, loneliness is not dependent on the number of relationships we have, but instead on our perception of their quality and meaningfulness. Thus, loneliness results from a perceived discrepancy between desired and achieved social relationships.⁸ The truth is that we may be judging those with whom we share relationships too harshly. Avoiding feeling lonely might require that we readjust our perceptions and reach out more to others. Reconnecting is possible.⁹



The Need for Control

Control deals with the need to establish and maintain satisfactory levels of influence and power in our relationships. To varying degrees, we like to believe that we can take charge of situations when we choose to. When our control need goes unmet, we may conclude that others are failing to respect or value our abilities and that they are viewing us as incapable of making sound decisions, directing others, or taking charge of our own future.

The Need for Affection

Affection involves our need to give and receive love and to experience emotionally close relationships. If our need for affection goes unfulfilled, we are likely to conclude that we are unlovable and that others will remain emotionally detached from us—that is, they won't establish close ties with us. In contrast, if our experiences with affection have been more pleasant, we probably are comfortable handling both close and distant relationships and most likely recognize that not everyone with whom we connect will necessarily care for us in the same way.

These Needs Are Not All Met at the Same Time

These three basic needs are not met at once. Inclusion comes first, because the need for inclusion impels us to establish a relationship in the first place. By comparison, our control and affection needs are met largely through our already established relationships. As William Schutz notes, "Generally speaking, inclusion is concerned with the problem of in or out, control is concerned with top or bottom, and affection with close or far."¹⁰ And this occurs whether we're talking about face-to-face or online relationships. In both contexts, we connect with others whom we hope will help us feel we belong, can exert influence, and are worthy of affection.¹¹

CONVERSING: CONNECTING THROUGH INTERPERSONAL DIALOGUE

When writing about flirting, one person observed:

“Woman spots man, Man spots woman. Woman smiles. Male looks away. Woman looks away. Man looks back. Will they speak to each other?”¹²

Flirting can create either an awkward moment or the start of a relationship. To be sure, technology complicates the act of flirting. When we’re texting, we can’t hear the tone of voice that a person is using or read their body language as we can do during face-to-face flirting. Not having such cues accessible can cause us to misinterpret everything. Is someone merely being friendly, or are they interested in more? The fact is flirting is more successful when we engage in face-to-face conversation. We need to talk to relate to others.¹³

TALK MATTERS

Talking is a fundamental consideration in every phase of a relationship—whether it is beginning, continuing, stabilizing, or ending. Conversation helps develop and reinforce a sense of connectedness as well as provide opportunities to discuss feelings and empathize. By speaking to others, we increase our understanding and appreciation for one another.¹⁴ Typically, the more time we spend conversing in a relationship, the healthier that relationship is.¹⁵ Although it may be easier to post photos of others or text others to demonstrate our connections with them, it is through face-to-face conversation and the attention paid to everyday talk that we are able to enact our social and work lives more fully.¹⁶

COMPETING CONCERNS

Certainly, devices may compete for our attention when we are face-to-face with another person. In fact, when was the last time you held an uninterrupted conversation, one in which you or your conversational partner did not have your heads down focusing on a smartphone for at least part of the time? When two of us are talking, the mere presence of a smartphone can change what we talk about and the degree of connection we feel with one another. When splitting our attention between smartphone and a physically present person, we become more disconnected from the physically present person, less observant of her or his nonverbal cues, and, therefore, less tuned into his or her feelings. As a result, we become less apt to empathize. Instead,



we become more likely to limit our talk to topics that are interruptible—which are those subjects not terribly important to us.¹⁷

BEING FULLY PRESENT

What happens when we are fully present in a conversation? How do we proceed? According to Steven Duck's **serial construction of meaning model**, before we engage in conversation with another person, we may share things in common with that person, expressed as *commonality*. As we converse about something that we share in common, we establish *mutuality*, and seek to determine if we evaluate the shared experience similarly. Once we establish the *equivalence of our evaluation*, we then process what Duck calls *shared meaning*. In other words, it is through conversation that we create a shared world.¹⁸ The fact is that we seek to converse with people who resemble us and share our attitudes.¹⁹

THE FIVE-STEP PATTERN

Many of our conversations follow a five-step pattern (even though they may not divide neatly into five steps): (1) open, (2) provide feedforward, (3) elaborate on your goal by getting down to business, (4) reflect back on what you have said, and (5) close.

The Open

The opening typically involves a verbal greeting, for example, “Hi there,” and/or a nonverbal greeting, perhaps a fist bump. You might introduce yourself, ask a question, or make an opening statement. (If conversing online, you might open with a greeting line containing an emoji.)

Feedforward. During the feedforward phase, you might widen the conversational opening by engaging in **phatic communication**, offering surface clichés designed to keep the channels of communication open. You could, for example, say, “What’s up? How are you doing?” or perhaps discuss the weather, and then provide a preview of the conversation’s purpose, perhaps saying something like, “You need to know about this.”

Goal Elaboration

In the next step, goal elaboration, you explain your goal or purpose, making statements of fact such as “I really support PETA” or statements of feeling such as “I think Juana really is into Joe, and it’s making me jealous.”

Reflection

During the fourth step, you reflect back on what you have discussed and seek common ground, for example, by saying, “Isn’t that ridiculous?” or “So, what do you think will happen?”

The Close

In the last phase of the conversation, you close and say your good-byes, called *leave taking*, again using verbal and/or nonverbal cues.

Take Turns

The expectation is that a conversation finds the parties to the relationship taking turns speaking and listening. By either taking turns or refusing to take turns, we influence the direction and nature of the conversation and relationship.

By offering *turn-yielding cues*, we let the other person know that we have finished commenting and are now prepared to listen. In contrast, if we ignore *turn-requesting cues*—messages that signal the other person's desire to speak—opting instead to continue dominating the conversation, it may turn off the other person, boding ill for our relationship's future.

The more skillful we are at keeping a conversation going, perhaps by using self-disclosure techniques to draw the other person into the conversation and not dividing our attention between a person and our device, the greater is the likelihood that such conversations will achieve mutual understanding and empathy. It is through them that we will develop our lasting personal and professional friendships.²⁰

CAREER BUILDER: THE GRAPEVINE AND THE GOSSIP MILL

When we perceive a workplace threat and management has done a poor job at putting our minds at ease, in order to reduce our feelings of insecurity and uncertainty, we may turn to the **grapevine**—a type of informal, conversational network existing in organizations—to share key messages. Although research reveals the grapevine to be uncannily speedy and accurate, the messages it carries are not necessarily being delivered to others intact. In fact, they sometimes emerge quite distorted and incomplete.²¹ By tapping into the grapevine, however, you can uncover clues regarding what's happening in organizational circles that could affect you.

Gossip mills differ from grapevines. The **gossip mill** is the network through which people in the organization spread unverified information. When we converse with someone about another individual who is not present, we are spreading gossip. Why do we gossip? Perhaps because we're addicted to it and use it to enhance our status. Gossip gets us into

inner circles and provides us with even more information to pass on. By sharing gossip, we signal that we trust the other person not to use the information we are sharing to harm us.²²

The gossiper frequently hypothesizes about the behavior of an absent party, spreads malicious or false information about him or her, and muses about the person's future. Thus, although gossip may make you feel important, it also can lead to others perceiving you more negatively. Gossip is risky business.

1. Identify a time when you used the grapevine to learn information you could use.
2. Identify a time when you were the recipient of gossip. What did you do with the information divulged to you?
3. Identify a time when you gossiped but were betrayed by the person you trusted?
4. What advice would you pass on to others about office grapevines and gossip mills?

Who Don't You Want to Talk To?

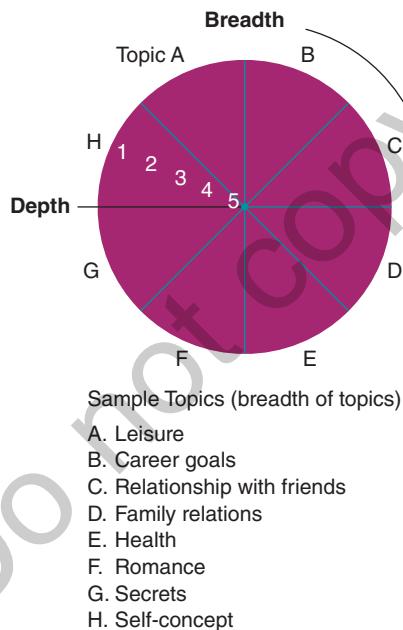
Good conversations are not necessarily easy. Sometimes we say something like, “I just can't talk to ____.” What makes us make such a pronouncement? Is it because we feel we have nothing in common and don't see things the same way? Is it because we find the other person's opinions clash with ours? Although this may be so, there are means we can use to have difficult conversations.

First, we need to be curious and keep an open mind. It is possible to learn from a person with whom we disagree. Second, we need to seek to understand rather than to agree or disagree. Third, always need to show respect. Fourth, we need to empathize. Fifth, we need to stay the course. And last, we should end the conversation by expressing our appreciation for the other person sharing her or his thoughts with us. Following these guidelines will provide a foundation for future conversations.²³

RELATIONSHIPS DIFFER IN BREADTH AND DEPTH

We can describe every relationship—whether with a friend, coworker, family member, or significant other—in terms of two concepts: breadth and depth. **Breadth** has to do with how many topics we and our relational partner discuss. **Depth** has to do with how central the topics are to our self-concept and how much we reveal.

FIGURE 7.1
Breadth and Depth



SOCIAL PENETRATION THEORY

A diagram of the relationship theory of social psychologists Irwin Altman and Dalmis Taylor, known as **social penetration theory**, is shown in Figure 7.1.²⁴ Central to social penetration theory is the idea that relationships develop incrementally beginning with relatively narrow breadth (we speak about only a few topics) and shallow depth (we do not penetrate the inner circles) and progress over time in intensity and intimacy as both breadth and depth increase. Thus, our relationships move from our discussing few to many topics and from superficial topics (the periphery of the circle) to intensely personal topics (the center of the circle). Figure 7.2 is an exercise using these concepts.

The social penetration model serves two key functions. First, it enables us to visualize the nature of our relationships by indicating the range of topics we communicate about and the extent to which we reveal ourselves through our discussions. Second, the model explains why some of our relationships are stronger than others.

SELF-DISCLOSURE AFFECTS RELATIONSHIP BREADTH AND DEPTH

Together, the nature and the amount of information we share with another person affect the strength and quality of our relationship. By deliberately revealing information about ourselves to another person, particularly information that we consider significant and that, without our personal intervention, would not be known to that individual, we increase both the breadth of information about us that the person has access to and the depth of understanding that she or he has for what makes us tick.

Self-disclosure is the voluntary revelation of confidential personal information about ourselves that we purposely reveal to others that they otherwise would not have access to or knowledge of. The amount of disclosing we do with another person is a gauge of how close we feel to the person or how close we want to become.

In contrast, when a relationship begins to wane, usually we decrease the breadth and the depth of our disclosures. We stop talking about some topics and discuss other topics in less depth. Changes like these signal that we are becoming less personal or intimate and instead have begun the de-penetration, or pulling away, process. In these ways, self-disclosure reflects a relationship's health. When disclosure between relationship partners is reciprocal and honest, partners feel more secure about the relationship and comfortable sharing their humanness.

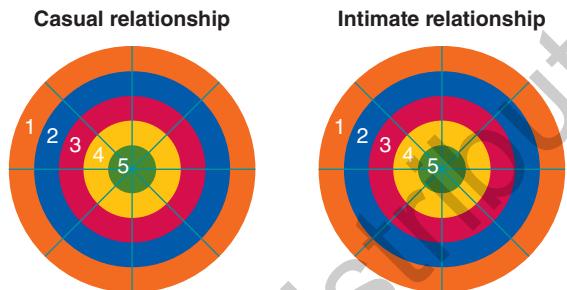
PRIVACY NEEDS AFFECT RELATIONSHIP BREADTH AND DEPTH

Although social penetration theory reveals the breadth and depth of the information we are willing to share in our various relationships, it is **communication privacy management theory** that describes the establishment of boundaries and borders that we decide others may or may not cross. For each of our relationships, we compute a “mental calculus” to guide us in deciding whether to share information with another or keep it private. If we opt to keep it private, we avoid disclosure by engaging in the deliberate withholding of information.²⁵ At times, we may want to conceal what another person wants us to reveal. Such disagreements can lead to *boundary turbulence*, the tension created when the parties to a relationship are unable to agree on the boundaries of self-disclosure.

What might cause us to decide to secure a boundary? Should we discover a partner revealing a secret, spying on us, or otherwise violating our confidence, the likelihood that we will

FIGURE 7.2

Casual and Intimate Relationships. Use the following drawings to distinguish how breadth and depth differ in a casual and intimate relationship that you share.



- Layers (depth)
1. Most superficial layer
(food, clothing, likes, dislikes)
 2. Impersonal layer
(job, education information)
 3. Middle layer
(political leanings, social views)
 4. More personal layer
(goals, values, beliefs, fears, secrets, dreams)
 5. Most personal layer—the inner core—
self-concept

keep personal information private increases and so does the likelihood that the curtain will drop on the relationship.

ANALYZING RELATIONSHIPS

Among the ways we can make sense of relationships is with reference to their stages, digital influences, costs and benefits, and dialectical perspectives.

RELATIONSHIP STAGES: A DEVELOPMENTAL MODEL

Our relationships are complex and ever-changing. As we evaluate them, we decide that some of them are right for us, but others are wrong.²⁶ As they evolve, they proceed through a number of stages during which they either will strengthen, stabilize, or dissolve.²⁷ As a relationship fluctuates, the parties to it move up or down a figurative relationship staircase, either moving closer to or further from committing to one another. We can advance, stay put, or retreat should we decide that a more superficial relationship is what we really desire. We also might terminate a relationship only to decide that we want to begin it anew.

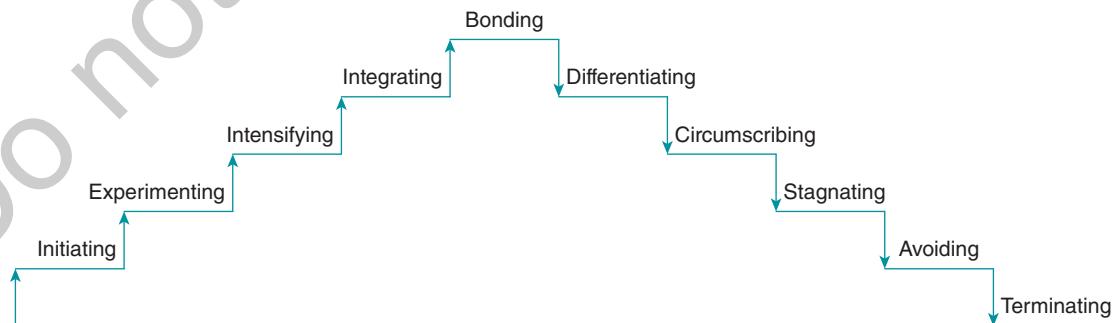
We move through relationship stages at our own pace. The relationship stage in which we're situated also determines the nature of our conversations, perhaps by limiting our talk to safe topics or by allowing probing questions in the effort to discover more about each other.

As we describe each relationship stage, consider how it applies to a close relationship of yours (Figure 7.3).

Stage 1: Initiating

Making contact and looking for signals that either lead us to begin a conversation or tell us that we have nothing to gain by conversing are instrumental in **initiating** a relationship. If we decide to converse, we search for an appropriate conversation opener, for example, "Nice to meet you" or "What are you up to?"

FIGURE 7.3



Stage 2: Experimenting

If successful at initiating contact, we next try to find out more about the other person; we begin to probe the unknown. This stage is called **experimenting**. In an effort to get to know one another, we exchange small talk, such as telling the other person where we're from and whom we know. Small talk, which helps put people at ease, serves a number of purposes:

1. It creates opportunities for more penetrating conversations.
2. It serves as a friendship audition or a means of increasing the scope of a current friendship.
3. It offers a safe procedure for revealing who we are and how the other person can get to know us better.
4. It lets us maintain a sense of community with our fellow human beings.²⁸

Small talk is like a game—its goal is to keep the conversational ball in the air.²⁹ Flirting is a form of small talk. At this stage, relationships lack depth; instead, they are casual and superficial. Many of our relationships never progress any further.

Stage 3: Intensifying

When a relationship progresses beyond experimenting, it enters the third stage, **intensifying**. During this stage, people become good friends. They start sharing things, disclose more, become better able to predict the behavior of the other, adopt nicknames for each other, and exhibit similar postural cues and clothing. The transformation from being an “I” to becoming a “we” begins.

Stage 4: Integrating

During Stage 4, **integrating**, two individuals have now become a team, a pair, a couple, or “a package.” Interpersonal synchrony heightens as we dress, act, and speak more alike, perhaps even sharing a song (“our song”) or a bank account.

Stage 5: Bonding

In Stage 5, **bonding**, the two people in the relationship announce that they're formalizing their commitment to one another. To accomplish this, they may institutionalize their relationship with a formal contract such as a wedding license or a written business agreement. The relationship takes on a new character. It is now guided by specified rules and regulations. Initially, this change can cause discomfort or rebellion as the two people in the relationship attempt to adapt.



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Stage 6: Differentiating

In Stage 6, **differentiating**, instead of continuing to emphasize their “we-ness,” the two people try to reestablish their “I” orientations in an effort to regain their unique identities. They ask, “How are we different?” “How can I distinguish me from you?” It is at this point that previously designated joint possessions take on a more individualized character. “Our friends” become “my friends.” “Our bedroom” becomes “my bedroom.” Our child” becomes “your son” (especially when he misbehaves). The urge to differentiate the self from the other is common (we need to be individuals as well as in relationships), but if it persists, it can signal relationship troubles and the beginning of the process of uncoupling.

Stage 7: Circumscribing

In Stage 7, **circumscribing**, both the quality and the quantity of communication between relationship partners decreases. Sometimes a careful effort is made to limit discussions to what’s considered safe. Other times there’s no decrease in breadth of topics, but instead subjects no longer are discussed with any depth. Fewer and less intimate disclosures occur, signaling that one or both partners desire to withdraw mentally and/or physically from the relationship.³⁰ Dynamic communication ceases. Feelings of exhaustion and shrinking interest come to characterize the relationship.

Stage 8: Stagnating

As circumscribing continues, the relationship stagnates. In Stage 8, **stagnating**, we feel that we no longer need to relate to each other, because we know the end result. We conclude it is better to say nothing. Our communication is at a standstill. We mark time by going through the motions of being in a relationship, but we feel nothing. The only thing we now share is an environment.

Stage 9: Avoiding

During the **avoiding** stage, we go out of our way to be apart. To increase the psychological distance between the two of us, we avoid making eye contact. Although sometimes communicated more directly than at other times, the dominant message of this stage is “I don’t want to see you anymore; I don’t want to continue this relationship.” The end of the relationship is in sight.

Stage 10: Termination

At Stage 10, **termination**, relationship bonds are severed and the relationship ends. Depending on if we agree on termination, this stage can be brief or drawn out. The relationship can end cordially or bitterly. All relationships eventually end (with the death of one party if not before), but this does not mean that saying good-bye is easy or pleasant. Breaking up, especially in the age of social media, can be very hard to do.

Some breakups are more difficult than others. According to communication researcher Steven Duck, as a relationship breaks up, we typically pass through four stages:³¹

1. *The self-talk stage*, in which we place our focus on relationship negatives, consider withdrawing totally from the relationship, and explore the potential positives of entering into an alternative relationship.
2. *The interpersonal communication stage*, in which we decide to confront, negotiate, and discuss possibilities for relationship repair and reconciliation, assess the

ramifications of withdrawing from the relationship, and ultimately decide to separate.

3. *The group and social communication stage*, during which we consider how to relate after breaking up. We may, for example, gossip about each other, tell stories, and place blame as a means of saving face.
4. *The grave dressing and public stage*, during which we offer a relationship postmortem—providing our respective publics with our own version of the breakup. Many former couples, for example, use social networks to tell their versions of the split, offering a stream of sometimes angry or sad posts. Although therapeutic for the person posting, they can be mortifying for the partner being attacked.³²

Revisiting this approach to relationship dissolution, Duck and Julia Wood next conceptualized the breakup as composed of five processes:³³

1. *Intrapsychic processes*, in which we brood about problems and our dissatisfaction with our relationship.
2. *Dyadic processes*, in which the rules and established patterns governing our relationship break down.
3. *Social support processes*, in which we air the relationship's dirty laundry for others outside the relationship, expecting others we know to take sides.
4. *Grave-dressing processes*, during which we determine the explanation we will give to friends, children, coworkers, and others for our breakup.
5. *Resurrection processes*, during which we enter and move forward into a future—minus a partner.

A SPECIAL CASE: RELATIONSHIP TERMINATION CAUSED BY A LOVED ONE'S PASSING

What happens when death takes a loved one away? When such a passage happens, we often experience feelings of grief that need to be worked through. Bereavement (i.e., how we adjust to the death of a loved one) is an individual matter; however, there is a process we can use to explain it.

The Grief Process

During the **grief process**, we pass through a series of stages (Figure 7.4). The first stage, denial, finds us rejecting what has happened. Denial eventually ebbs, however, as we acknowledge the impact of our loss and our accompanying feelings. During the second stage, anger, we feel helpless and powerless, striking out and railing against the loss. The third stage finds us experiencing guilt—we turn our anger against ourselves. We feel bad about



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FIGURE 7.4
Grief Process



things we said or did to hurt the person who has died. We experience a sense of unfinished business. In the fourth stage, depression, we feel that nothing will ever be right again. Looking forward feels impossible. We feel lonely, empty, and isolated. The fifth and last stage is acceptance. At this point, we acknowledge that things will not be the same, but we believe that we will make it through, and we will be able to go on with life.³⁴

How do we get to the fifth stage? By processing and expressing our feelings instead of trying to suppress and walk around our sadness. With the help and support of others, we become able to handle, rather than submerge, our grief, recover from grief's effects, and continue living by reengaging in consummate partnerships and new relationships.³⁵

How Others Help

Others help us in bereavement by knowing how to address our feelings. They comfort us in a number of ways. First, they help by addressing our pain, not ignoring it. ("I'm so saddened by Adam's passing. I'm going to miss him a lot and so will everyone who knew him.") Second, they express their sympathy. ("I'm so sorry you are having to go through this. Please know my thoughts are with you and your family.") Third, they offer a statement reflective of something positive that the person's loved one represented. ("Adam was always there to listen to my problems. I'll always remember his helping me through a really tough time.") Fourth, they do not say that they know how the bereaved person feels. Attention remains on the person who suffered the loss. Finally, they offer help. Instead of asking the bereaved to call them if she or he needs anything, they take control, saying something like, "I'll call you tomorrow to let you know when to expect some food I'm ordering for you."

DIGITAL MEDIA AND RELATIONAL PROCESSES

Digital media are redefining not only the very nature of our relationships but also the processes our relationships go through, beginning with how we start one.³⁶ Many relationships have non-IRL (in real life) existences. Some users prefer it that way, because they feel vulnerable and are likely to shy away from physical encounters. Instead, they choose to flirt or even have "casual" phone sex in their fantasy worlds but with no intention of ever meeting the other person face-to-face. What is more, if others are discerning, they can use the messages we post to uncover our thoughts and aspects of our personality, including whether or not we're extroverted, how agreeable we are, our emotional stability, our openness to experience, and our conscientiousness.³⁷

Tinder-Like Apps

When using an app such as Tinder, we expose ourselves to an expanded pool of partner possibilities. Then we simply can swipe right (if a photo of someone appeals to us) or left

(if it doesn't) to indicate whether we would like to begin a relationship with a person. We can decide later if we want to turn it into a real-life relationship. Thus, digital media make it easier for us both to flirt and to follow up on our initial flirtations by messaging interest. We get an ego boost when discovering that an expressed interest is mutual.³⁸



Dropping Relationship Breadcrumbs

To keep relationships going and a partner “hanging on” and connected even though a relationship has plateaued, digital adherents may offer their online relationship partners “breadcrumbs” through which they check in, seeking to maintain the relationship in name only, piquing the other person’s interest, but making absolutely no commitment to get together or take the relationship further. These are not conversations but, rather, connectors meant to keep someone “on relationship hold.”³⁹

It's Over

Digital media also make it easier for us end a relationship. We may use digital assistance to help us end a relationship, such as the Breakup Shop, a firm that will send a breakup message for you.⁴⁰ We also can end a relationship ourselves merely by signaling a change of status, untagging photos, burying past posts, editing our Facebook walls, defriending a former partner without telling him or her ahead of time, or simply blocking his or her access to us. Before the digital age, we might not have been so mean or blunt in ending a relationship. Usually, we'd at least try to engage in face-to-face dialogue before calling it quits.⁴¹ Now, we have a stream of endless apps we can use.⁴² When we rely on digital media, however, our communication easily can become more impersonal. Somehow, texting that a relationship is over seems colder than breaking up in person.

It Ended . . . but Not Really

Prior to the digital age, we might pack up photos and other relationship reminders and either put them away or throw them out. Digital images on the Web, in contrast, persist. Online, it also seems as if the whole world is watching and privy to our breakup when it occurs.⁴³ As a result, online apps such as Mend exist to help the brokenhearted. On Mend, users meet an animated avatar, whose reassuring voice offers advice on how to recover from feeling like an emotional basket-case, encouraging the brokenhearted to move forward rather than give in to the shame some associate with breaking up.⁴⁴

What happens online when either a relationship or a partner's life ends? Social media profiles persist. The former relationship or partner can be dead, yet present. Digital mementos of online relationships survive the demise of a relationship or person. Digital gravesites such as Facebook's “memorial profiles” are becoming places of mourning allowing grieving to occur online.

RELATIONSHIPS COME WITH COSTS AND BENEFITS

Feelings of acceptance are necessary for relationship satisfaction. The energy we are willing to commit to a relationship influences its outcome. Unless the people in a relationship continue to grow together and adapt to their continually changing environment, the relationship will deteriorate.

According to **cost–benefit/social exchange theory**, we work to maintain a relationship only as long as the benefits we perceive for ourselves outweigh the costs.⁴⁵ These benefits include feelings of self-worth, a sense of personal growth, a greater sense of security, additional resources for accomplishing tasks, and an increased ability to cope with problems. In comparison, costs include the time spent trying to make the relationship work, psychological and physical distress, and a damaged self-image. We enter our relationships with a **comparison level** in mind. We have a general idea, standard, or expectation of the kinds of rewards and profits that we believe we ought to get out of the relationship. When the rewards we receive equal or surpass our comparison level, we usually feel satisfied with the relationship. However, we also have a **comparison level for alternatives**. We compare the rewards we get from a current relationship with the ones we think we would be able to get from an alternative relationship. If we believe the present relationship rewards are below those we could receive from an alternative relationship, then we might decide to exit our present relationship and enter a new one.

Consider relationships in economic terms: Each partner acts out of a self-oriented goal of maximizing profits. When relationship rewards or profits are high and relationship costs are low, the more satisfying the relationship is and the more likely it is to continue.⁴⁶ Once costs outweigh benefits, however, we could begin to think seriously about terminating the relationship. Cost–benefit/social exchange theory predicts that the worth of a relationship influences its outcome. Positive relationships simply are more apt to endure.

RELATIONSHIPS EXPERIENCE TENSIONS

According to relational dialectics theorists, relationships are not linear but rather consist of the oscillation between contradictory personal goals. During relationship development, relational partners seek to meet goals, a number of which may be incompatible. As opposing goals meet, they create **dialectical tensions**. Three central relational dialectical tensions affecting relationships are connection and autonomy, predictability and novelty, and openness and privacy.⁴⁷ Let's explore each in turn.

Connection Versus Autonomy

We want to be independent of our significant others as well as to experience intimacy with them. We want to be close and separate. Perhaps you have found yourself saying something like this about a partner: “He barely spent any time with me,” “She made me feel trapped,” “He just wouldn't commit to being together,” or “I need my freedom.” If any of these statements sound familiar, then you and a partner had conflicting desires for connection and independence.

Because we want to establish more intimate connections with others we care about, we cherish the sharing of experiences. At the same time, however, we seek to preserve an independent identity. We don't want our relationships to erase our individuality.

Some relationships don't survive the connection–autonomy, self–other negotiations. Instead of working out an acceptable balance that preserves individuality while creating intimacy, partners may break up. In contrast, when they resolve connection–autonomy disagreements, they can redefine their relationship and even become closer.⁴⁸

Predictability Versus Novelty

We desire both the excitement of change and the comfort of stability. We like routine as well as spontaneity. Too much routine, however, becomes boring. Perhaps these words sound familiar: “We always do the same things.” “I want to do something different.” “I know everything there is to know about her.” Variety adds spice to normal routines. The challenge for relationship partners is to find the right mix between desire for predictability and the need to keep the relationship fresh and interesting.

Openness Versus Privacy

We wrestle with tensions between disclosure and silence or concealment. For many of us, complete openness is intolerable. Just as there are times we want to share our inner selves with those whom we care deeply about, there are times when we don't feel like sharing and desire privacy instead. Desiring privacy some of the time doesn't mean a relationship is broken. Our desire for openness or concealment waxes and wanes. We go through periods of disclosing and periods of withholding.⁴⁹ During every stage of our relationship, our desires for openness and privacy can fluctuate.

Dialectical Tension Resolutions

When a relationship is successful, partners are able to use a number of strategies to manage the dialectical tensions. First, they can negotiate a balance between connection and autonomy, predictability and novelty, and openness and closedness. Second, they can choose to favor one dialectic and ignore the other. Third, they can segment each of the dialectics by compartmentalizing different areas of their relationship and assigning each dialectic to different times or spheres. Fourth, they can reframe the dialectics by defining them as not contradictory at all.⁵⁰ It is not terribly effective to handle dialectical tensions by denying their existence. The fact is that ignoring relationship challenges rather than confronting them rarely succeeds long term.

LYING, TRUST, AND RELATIONSHIPS

Have lying, deception, and “post-truth” become characteristic of our 21st-century lives? After all, it is probable that during a typical week many of us do tell more than one lie.⁵¹ And we are not just talking about politicians and actors. We lie to people with whom we share all kinds of relationships: We lie to our parents, professors, significant others, friends, family members, coworkers, and even ourselves. How can we explain this?

Telling the truth and lying are part of being human.⁵² They are ways of relating, and we can use one or the other as a means of getting the outcome we desire.⁵³ In your opinion, is it

always harmful, unethical, or immoral to lie consciously, whether deceiving another person or yourself? Would you ever want someone to lie to you? What would you never be willing to lie about either to another person or yourself?

THE EFFECTS OF LYING

Do you agree with the following statement? “Everyone is entitled to his (or her) own opinion, but not to his (or her) own facts.”⁵⁴ When we lie, we make up facts or bend them to suit ourselves. Thus, a lie is the deliberate presentation of information that we know to be untrue.

We can lie either by commission or omission. When we lie by omission, we deliberately withhold relevant information, thereby contributing to others drawing an erroneous conclusion. When we lie by commission, we make a statement that we know to be false.

Sometimes, we lie so to continue to satisfy the basic needs that a particular relationship fulfills. Other times, we lie to increase desired or decrease undesired affiliations, to present a false image, to inflate our self-image and protect our self-esteem, or to achieve personal satisfaction.⁵⁵ We also lie to cover up something we did that was wrong. Most often, the lies we tell benefit ourselves, although some lies are designed to protect the person we are lying to, and a few benefit a third party. We lie to protect and acquire more resources. We lie to enhance our social attractiveness or present ourselves as more competent than we think we are. We lie to avoid conflict.⁵⁶

Sometimes we **equivocate**, that is, we use purposefully vague language to finesse a response in an effort to avoid having to tell someone the unvarnished and unpleasant truth. Being deliberately vague helps us spare another’s feelings and/or relieves us of having to address our anger. For example, if asked how we like a gift given to us, we might reply, “It’s really special,” when actually we think it’s tasteless. Or, if asked how we like someone’s hairstyle, we might say, “It’s really you,” when we believe it’s unflattering. Equivocating takes the teller of the lie off the hot seat. It also helps the receiver save face. Would you rather have someone equivocate or tell you the truth?

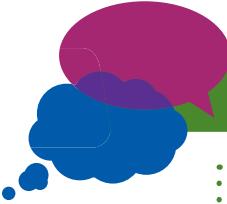
Why Lying Takes a Toll

Studies of deception reveal that the act of lying strains the lie-teller both psychologically and physically. Just the act of information suppression causes thoughts to flood our consciousness, which contributes to our looking and sounding tenser.⁵⁷ On the other hand, sometimes we want to be lied to, because we don’t know how to handle the truth. Does the blame for lying then fall on both the liar and the person lied to?

Once a lie is spoken, how does it affect the liar, the person who was lied to, and their relationship? Once a lie is uncovered, it changes how we feel about the relationship. Imagine sharing a relationship, no matter how ideal in other aspects, in which you were unable to rely on what the other person said or did? The information you exchanged would become virtually worthless. You might become resentful, disappointed,

and suspicious. You might feel wronged and wary of what could come next. You might become angry with yourself for letting yourself be duped—for your inability to determine what was and what was not true. You might also feel shame for having been in denial or for having ignored warning signs. You likely would reevaluate everything based on the lie(s) that had come to light.⁵⁸

While bending the truth to sustain a relationship may be a common practice, unless trust and truthfulness are present, it is only a matter of time before the relationship will die. Lying functions as a catalyst in precipitating a relationship crisis. Many breakups are attributed directly to the discovery of a major deception.



ETHICS AND COMMUNICATION

Self/Other Reflection

Interview three people from cultures other than your own regarding their experience of being lied to and of lying to someone else.

1. Ask each person to identify who lied to them, the nature of the lie and its context, and their reactions on discovering that they had been lied to.
2. Ask each person to describe the nature of the lie they told, their reason for lying, and the other person's reaction on discovering she or he had been deceived.
3. Whether they were the person lying or being lied to, ask them the specific effect(s) the lie had on their relationship with the other individual.

Switch focus. In your opinion, could telling someone the truth sabotage trust, the way lying does? Explain.

THE EFFECTS OF TRUST

There is a potential for trouble in any relationship. As we now recognize, one cause of trouble is lying, primarily because once discovered, it eats away at trust. **Trust** is an outgrowth of interpersonal communication. It is a reflection of how secure we are that another person will act in a predicted and desirable way. When we trust someone, we are confident that this person will behave as we expect and that he or she will not use whatever personal information we have confided in him or her to harm us.

Some of us are more trusting than others. How trusting a person are you?

The Trust Paradox

Whether or not we trust someone depends on whether prior relationships have reinforced trusting behavior or contributed to our being fearful about exhibiting trusting behavior. Trust creates a paradox. To be able to trust, we must be willing to risk trusting another person. When we take that risk, we risk being wrong. If we fail to take the risk, however, we never can be right.⁵⁹

How Well Do You Tolerate Vulnerability?

The degree of trust we place in another person to accept information we disclose without hurting us or the relationship is a measure of our **tolerance of vulnerability**. This varies from person to person, topic to topic, and situation to situation. Researcher William Rawlins designed a matrix, shown in Figure 7.5, which we can use to analyze the amount of trust we place in different people at different times in our relationship's development. We also can use this matrix to determine which of our relationships have more stability or staying power. A relationship in which the partners have difficulty trusting one another is a troubled one.

Hurtful Messages

Troubled relationships typically involve the sending of **hurtful messages** that are designed to upset or cause emotional pain that further hamper trust. If the hurtful messages are intense, making it difficult for their target to ignore or forget them, they can poison the relationship by making it impossible to sustain closeness or derive satisfaction from it.

How do you respond when you're the target of a hurtful message? Some of us may end up simply accepting the hurtful message without challenging it, especially if the hurtful message makes us feel particularly vulnerable and causes us significant emotional pain. The less painful the message is, however, the more able we are to communicate our invulnerability. When a relationship is healthy and satisfying, the more likely it is that we will respond actively when we are the target of a hurtful message.⁶⁰

FIGURE 7.5

Rawlins's Trust Matrix

	High need to be open	Low need to be open
High amount of trust in other's discretion	I Very tolerant of vulnerability (reveal)	III Judgment required
Low amount of trust in other's discretion	II Judgment required	IV Intolerant of vulnerability (conceal)

LAUGHTER AS INTERPERSONAL TOOL

Like trust, laughter also may serve us as an interpersonal tool. Every day we give and receive social laughter when interacting with friends, coworkers, and significant others. Laughter punctuates our conversations so often that we may not stop to appreciate its value. If, however, laughter disappeared from any of our important relationships, we would miss it sorely. By triggering the release of “feel good” chemicals in our brain, laughter impels us to connect with others. It also supports the creation of relationship depth.⁶¹

Humor can help us cope with anything, even the loss of someone we love. Once we are able to laugh again, we know that we are regaining control. Laughter also helps reduce stress by releasing excess energy. Like other interpersonal competencies, it enables us to develop fresh perspectives on events large and small by freeing us of anxious feelings and frustrations.

Laughter, called “rhythmic bursts of social glue” by one commentator, is contagious.⁶² When we hear laughter, we typically begin laughing ourselves. The infectious nature of laughter can have dramatic effects on our relationships. Laughter helps synchronize both our mood and behavior, solidifying our relationship.

Like any relationship tool, laughter can have a downside. The opposite of joyful laughter is jeering, malicious laughter, laughter that is designed to punish, belittle, or exclude rather than include. In this case, rather than express our sociability, laughter signals our disdain for, and power over, someone else.



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GENDER AND RELATIONSHIPS

When polled regarding their reasons for desiring intimacy in relationships, 20 of the top 25 reasons given by men and women were the same. Included among these were feeling attracted to the person, experiencing affection for the person, and a desire to express their love.⁶³ Gender also makes itself visible in non-hetero relationships. Lesbian relationships tend to be higher in disclosure and in partner equality, while gay male couples are more likely to limit both disclosiveness and emotional expressiveness.⁶⁴ Gay and lesbian men and women also engage in less stereotypical role-playing than do heterosexual partners.⁶⁵

THE BENEFITS OF A FEMINIST PARTNER

In a study titled “The Interpersonal Power of Feminism: Is Feminism Good for Romantic Relationships?” the authors answered the question they posed in their article’s title with a yes.

For both men and women, having a feminist partner was perceived as a benefit. In fact, feminist women were the most likely to be in romantic relationships characterized as healthier in terms of perceived relationship quality, equality, stability, and intimacy.⁶⁶

FLIRTING MATTERS

Men and women may differ in behavior exhibited during the preliminary stages of a romantic relationship—particularly when flirting. For men, flirting is a form of foreplay—a verbal power struggle. For women, it often is more of “a way of making a connection.”⁶⁷

WHO'S SORRY?

When in a relationship, women are likely to apologize more than their male partners. They do so not because they *actually* have done something wrong—they just *think* they have. Women and men interpret “wrong” differently. It appears that a woman's threshold for offensive behavior is lower than a man's. Because men have a higher tolerance for offensive behavior, they sometimes fail to apologize for things that women think are worthy of an apology.⁶⁸

WHO ENGAGES MORE WITH SOCIAL MEDIA?

Women are more engaged in using social media in their relationships than are men. They also are less apt than men to project their own feelings onto a partner.⁶⁹ Whereas men may post more videos online, women (particularly teenagers), in their effort to please someone who interests them, sext more—sending sexually explicit messages of themselves to the other person. When such images get into the wrong hands, they can end up being posted online for all to see. Frequently when this happens, cyberbullying attacks ensue. Women also post more, in general, on social media, perhaps because they have been taught to be social, communal, and to make stories about themselves. In contrast, men have not been taught to engage in confessional or emotional communication.⁷⁰

WHO FOCUSES ON MAINTENANCE?

Women focus more on relationship maintenance than do men. They rely on maintenance strategies, including the use of personal and disclosive talk, to acquire personal information about a partner.⁷¹ Because women desire a partner who demonstrates care and concern and who is empathetic, they model those same behaviors. Women engage in more relationship monitoring and assume primary responsibility for caring for the relationship. In lesbian couples, partners tend to assume mutual responsibility for nurturing the relationship and providing emotional support. This may be why lesbian couples, in general, report more satisfaction with romantic relationships than do either heterosexual or gay couples.⁷²

WHAT WE SHARE

Women and men share many commonalities in their views about relationships. Both value same-sex friends and seek friends whom they can trust. They also value those who accept

and will help them. People who have fulfilling same-sex friendships report higher levels of personal well-being. Those who share effective sibling relationships do as well.⁷³

CULTURE AND RELATIONSHIPS

Do people from diverse cultures desire the same things in and from their relationships?

Attitudes toward the self and others influence the effectiveness of relationships shared by people from different cultures. Whereas some cultures emphasize social relationships and instruct individuals to give preference to the interests of others over their own private interests, other cultures, including U.S. culture, stress individualism. Americans find it natural to begin and end relationships; in contrast, Asian cultures believe that relationships should be long-lasting and characterized by loyalty and the fulfillment of obligations.

Not all cultures treat all relationships similarly. Some cultures, for instance, have different rules for heterosexual relationships and same-sex relationships, and others have men and women performing different relationship roles. Whereas same-sex marriage is legal across the United States and much of the developed world, in some countries same-sex couples face ostracism or severe consequences, including arrest or death.

In the United States, both men and women can begin and end their romantic relationships. We typically believe that any person has the right and ability to dissolve a relationship that makes him or her unhappy. This is not true in all cultures. In some cultures, parents select relationship partners for their children. Sometimes, their goal is to bring two families together. Other times, it is to reap a financial reward.

MORE ON TECHNOLOGY AND RELATIONSHIPS

Have you considered how technology is affecting your relationships? As we have seen, in increasing numbers, we are beginning and building our personal relationships online, with many of us having online romances. Dating sites continue to multiply, signaling the eroding role that family, friends, and coworkers are playing in fostering love connections.⁷⁴ Many of us now rely on swiping to make a connection that could lead to our meeting for a drink. We then text to sustain our connection, sending out streams of brief updates in the effort to build and develop feelings of closeness.⁷⁵

DOES TECHNOLOGY HELP?

To be sure, technology is making it easier for us to find and connect with others. Technological advances have enabled us to overcome traditional barriers of space and time as we traverse both time zones and international borders. However, somewhat surprisingly, we also find ourselves relying on technology in order for us to relate with people living and working in

close proximity to our actual physical location. As society puts more and more emphasis on using technology, some fear the result, believing it will show that we place too little emphasis on our personal relationships—whether they are work, friendship, or romantically based. In fact, some assert, for all practical purposes, we stopped talking to one another in about the year 2010—when the use of instant messaging and text messaging exploded.⁷⁶

POPULARITY IS QUANTIFIABLE, BUT IS THIS APPROPRIATE?

Technology has also contributed to our being able to quantify popularity. The metrics are available for all to see. We count likes. We count views. We share our counts. Digital and physical lives merge, with digital popularity transforming people into “influencers” who are seen as desirable to hang out with, much like the prom queen and king used to be. We pose for selfies that will look good online but are quite ridiculous looking in person.⁷⁷

How is technological connectivity impacting the nature of our social and professional relationships? Is it contributing to or accelerating the pace of face-to-face disconnections? Are we paying less attention to those people who share the space we’re in, so that we may pay more attention to those who are more physically remote? Are we treating digital connectivity as if it were the same as, and more important than, face-to-face connectivity?⁷⁸



FACTORS HAMPERING RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT ONLINE

What are some differences between face-to-face and online communication that could hamper relationship development? First, in cyberspace a person remains invisible to us unless we FaceTime, Skype, or post photos. Second, because of fewer nonverbal cues, we may misinterpret the intended meaning of a message sent to us. Third, because it is more difficult to control the pace of online interaction, some of the spontaneity and immediate feedback that characterize and animate face-to-face interactions are lacking. Fourth, because we don’t have access to as much information (verbal and nonverbal) as face-to-face communication offers, it may be harder for us to decide if we trust the other person. Fifth, simply due to the inelasticity of time, the more time we spend on online interaction the less time we have for face-to-face interpersonal interaction. As we become more active in the online social scene, we may scale back or cut off our more traditional interactions. Sixth, fakers can click their way into online relationships. Because it is easier to conceal true identities online, it is wise to proceed cautiously, being careful not to reveal personal information that could put your personal security at risk.

SOME FIND IT EASIER

Despite such drawbacks, as we've noted, some do find it easier to begin a relationship online. At least until photos are shared or a video uploaded, appearance remains on the back burner. Whether a relationship that is begun online continues depends on the rapport-building skills of the users. Additionally, those who are homebound are able to use social networks to overcome feelings of isolation and loneliness. Many find it easier to disclose information online that we usually keep secret. However, it also becomes easier for our innermost secrets to be exposed. On one site aptly named PostSecret.com, there are a plethora of secrets that others have posted because they are seeking self-clarification and/or catharsis. Anyone can read them. Although privacy gives us the right to keep our personal feelings secret, many post their secrets anyway. In fact, many people troll their friends just to see what secrets they might be revealing to others.⁷⁹ What is not shared with us directly may still be discoverable online.



Ending a friendship or romance online is frequently a one-sided event that is accomplished with a simple click on Facebook, a practice called *defriending*—a term that first entered the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 2010. Contrast this with the more gradual, mutual fading away that tends to occur in the physical world. In contrast, individuals who find themselves defriended online often report having been blindsided.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Practice Improving Interpersonal Relationships

Whether to begin, develop, and perhaps terminate a relationship in the digital world or the physical world is up to you. The fact that this now is a choice attests to the power of virtual worlds in our lives. But which domain, the physical or the digital, fosters more accurate perceptions of a person, enabling us to perceive him or her based on more than our wants and needs alone?⁸⁰ Whatever you prefer, building a relationship that satisfies will take work. What should we do to enhance that possibility?

Actively seek information from others, and allow others to seek information from you.

People who fail to initiate contact or fail to reinforce the communication and conversation efforts of others are less likely to build stable foundations for effective relationships. Passive, restrained

(Continued)

(Continued)

communicators are instead more likely to remain chronically lonely. Although we all experience short-term loneliness from time to time, sustained loneliness can lead to social apathy.

Recognize that relationships evolve.

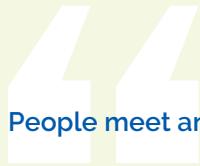
Ours is a mobile and increasingly technological society in which each change we experience has the potential to bring us different relationships. Be prepared for changes in relationships. Recognize that in your life you are likely to experience a certain amount of relational turnover and change. As you grow and develop, so will your relationships.

Know when to sever a relationship.

Although one party to a relationship may desire to sustain it, not all relationships or connections are meant to continue forever. When a relationship drains you of your energy and confidence, or when it becomes unhealthy, you need to extricate yourself from it before it destroys you.

Recognize that communication is the lifeblood of a relationship.

Without communication, relationships are sure to shrivel and die. Any relationship that is worth time and energy depends on effective communication to sustain and nourish it. The desire and motivation to communicate are key ingredients in a relationship's establishment and growth.



People meet and separate. But funny things happen in between.

Mark L. Knapp

COMPLETE THIS CHAPTER 7 CHECKLIST

7.1 I can describe the various functions of relationships and the needs they fulfill.

Any interpersonal relationship is a meaningful, dyadic, person-to-person connection in which two interdependent people engage in communication of a personal nature, develop a shared history, and try to meet each other's social needs. Relationships play many roles in our lives, including fulfilling our inclusion, control, and affection needs.

7.2 I can discuss the role conversations play in relationships.

Conversation plays a fundamental part in our relationships. In fact, we enact our relationships through our conversations. Most conversations can be divided into five steps: (1) open, (2) provide feedforward, (3) elaborate on your goal, (4) reflect back on what you have said, and (5) close. It is through conversation that we are able to create a shared world with another person.

7.3 I can explain the significance of depth and breadth in relationships.

Every relationship we share is unique and varies in breadth (how many topics relational partners discuss) and depth (how much they are willing to reveal their feelings to one another). According to the social penetration model, most relationships develop by beginning with narrow breadth

and shallow depth. Over time, some relationships increase in breadth and depth, becoming wider, more intimate, or both.

7.4 I can analyze relationships according to their stages, digital media influences, cost-benefit/social exchange implications, and relationship dialectics.

Researchers have identified a number of stages through which our relationships may pass: initiating, experimenting, intensifying, integrating, bonding, differentiating, circumscribing, stagnating, avoiding, and termination. A relationship may stabilize at any stage. Digital media influence relational processes, providing non-IRL (in real life) existences and redefining the nature of our relationships and the stages they go through, including how we start, maintain, and end them. Cost-benefit/social exchange theory holds that we work to maintain those relationships that yield the greatest personal profits and fewest costs. Relational dialectics explore the oscillation that occurs between conflicting relationship goals.

7.5 I can explain how deception and trust affect relationships.

Telling the truth and deception are each a way of relating. Telling the truth leads to others trusting us. Lying causes others to be wary of continuing a relationship.

7.6 I can describe laughter's role in relationships. □

By triggering the release of “feel good” chemicals in our brain, laughter impels us to connect with others. It also supports the creation of relationship depth and health.

7.7 I can explain how gender influences relationship formation, maintenance, and termination. □

Gender affects how we approach, form, sustain, and dissolve relationships. It affects the nature of the communication occurring between the parties in the relationship and influences how the parties view the relationship itself.

7.8 I can explain how culture influences relationship formation, maintenance, and termination. □

Not all cultures process and treat relationships similarly. Members of diverse cultures differ in their approach to social

relationships with some giving preference to the interests of others over their own interests and others stressing individualism.

7.9 I can discuss the impact of technology on relationships. □

How we communicate plays a key part in determining whether our relationships are as effective and rewarding for us as they could be. Changes in the channels we rely on to communicate have both positive and negative relationship ramifications. Some fear that digital connectivity is becoming more consequential than face-to-face connectivity.

7.10 I can apply skills to improve the effectiveness of my relationships. □

Because communication is the lifeblood of every relationship, it is important we learn to use it to avoid loneliness, foster meaningful relationships that evolve as we grow, and end those relationships that are no longer meant to continue.

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