

### **3. Interpersonal communication**

Interpersonal communication is exchange of information between two or more people. It is also an area of study. Related skills are learned and can be improved. During interpersonal communication there is message sending and message receiving. This can be conducted using both direct and indirect methods. Successful interpersonal communication is when the message senders and the message receivers understand the message.

#### **3.1 The role of interpersonal communication**

The role of interpersonal communication has been studied mainly as a mediator for mass media effects. Since Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) introduced their ‘filter hypothesis’, maintaining that personal communication mediates the influence of mass communication on individual voters, many studies have repeated this logic when combining personal and mass communication in effect studies on election campaigns (Schmitt-Beck, 2003). Although some research exists that examines the activities of social networking and the potential effects, both positive and negative, on its users, there is a gap in the empirical literature. Social networking relies on technology and is conducted over specific devices with no presence of face-to-face interaction, which results in an inability to access interpersonal behavior and signals to facilitate communication. (Drussel, 2012) As many positive advances we’ve seen come from the latest web innovations, can it be said that there are negative ones as well? Interpersonal communication is defined as what one uses with both spoken and written words as the basis to form and maintain personal relationships with others (Heil 2010). As technological advancements are made, the residual impact of social networking on society’s young generation is of valuable importance to researchers in the social work field. Left unattended, the lack of skills to effectively communicate and resolve conflicts in person may negatively affect behavior and impair the ability to develop and maintain relationships. (Drussel, 2012)

Technological side effects may not always be apparent to the individual user and, combined with millions of other users, may have large-scale implications. Therefore, each participant has a dual role—as an individual who may be affected by the social environment and as a participant who is interacting with others and co-constructing the same environment (Greenfield & Yan, 2006). Berson, Berson and Ferron (2002) believe that benefits of online interaction included learning relational skills, expressing thoughts and feelings in a healthy way, practicing critical thinking skills but I do not agree with them because I think one of important negative point of

interpersonal communication through social network is that people who rely on social networking are losing the ability to talk with others in real life. On the other hand, positive and negative effect of using interpersonal communication varies and depend on your point of view then we can not give this question specific answer.

### **3.2 Context**

Context refers to the conditions that precede or surround the communication. It consists of present or past events from which the meaning of the messages is derived, though it may also, in the case of written communications, depend upon the statements preceding and following the quotation in question. Immediate surrounding may also color the perceived meaning of words; normally safe discourse may easily become contextually ambiguous or offensive in restrooms or shower halls. These influences do not constitute the message by themselves, but rather these extraneous nuances subtly change the message's effective meaning. Ultimately, context includes the entire world, but usually refers to salient factors such as the following:

Physical milieu the season or weather, current physical location and environment  
Situational milieu classroom, military conflict, supermarket checkout  
Cultural and linguistic backgrounds  
Developmental progress (maturity) or emotional state  
Complementary or contrasting roles boss and employee; teacher and student; parent, child, and spouse; friend or enemy; partner or competitor

### **3.3 Theories**

#### **Uncertainty reduction theory**

Uncertainty reduction theory comes from the sociopsychological perspective. It addresses the basic process of how we gain knowledge about other people. According to the theory people have difficulty with uncertainty, they want to be able to predict behavior and therefore they are motivated to seek more information about people.

The theory argues that strangers, upon meeting, go through certain steps and checkpoints in order to reduce uncertainty about each other and form an idea of whether one likes or dislikes the other. As we communicate we are making plans to accomplish our goals. At highly uncertain moments we become more vigilant and rely more on data available in the situation. When we are less certain we lose confidence in our own plans and make contingency plans. The theory also says that

higher levels of uncertainty create distance between people and that non-verbal expressiveness tends to help reduce uncertainty.

Constructs include level of uncertainty, nature of the relationship and ways to reduce uncertainty. Underlying assumptions include that an individual will cognitively process the existence of uncertainty and take steps to reduce it. The boundary conditions for this theory are that there must be some kind of outside social situation trigger and internal cognitive process.

According to the theory we reduce uncertainty in three ways:

1. Passive strategies: observing the person.
2. Active strategies: asking others about the person or looking up info.
3. Interactive strategies: asking questions, self-disclosure.

### **Social exchange theory**

Social exchange theory falls under the symbolic interaction perspective. The theory predicts, explains and describes when and why people reveal certain information about themselves to others. The social exchange theory uses Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) theory of interdependence. This theory states that "relationships grow, develop, deteriorate, and dissolve as a consequence of an unfolding social-exchange process, which may be conceived as a bartering of rewards and costs both between the partners and between members of the partnership and others" (Huston & Burgess, 1979, p. 4). Social exchange theory argues the major force in interpersonal relationships is the satisfaction of both people's self-interest. Theorists say self-interest is not necessarily a bad thing and that it can actually enhance relationships.

According to the theory human interaction is like an economic transaction, in that you may seek to maximize rewards and minimize costs. You will reveal information about yourself when the cost-rewards ratio is acceptable to you. As long as rewards continue to outweigh costs a couple will become increasingly intimate by sharing more and more personal information. The constructs of this theory include disclosure, relational expectations, and perceived rewards or costs in the relationship. Levinger (1965, 1976) discussed marital success as dependent on all the rewarding things within the relationship, such as emotional security and sexual fulfillment. He also argued that marriages either succeed or fail based on the barriers to leave the relationship, like financial hardships, and the presence of alternative attractions, like

infidelity. Levinger stated that marriages will fail when the attractions of the partners lessen, the barriers to leave the spouse are weak, and the alternatives outside of the relationship are appealing.

The underlying assumptions include that humans weigh out rewards versus costs when developing a relationship. The boundary conditions for this theory are that at least two people must be having some type of interaction.

Social exchange also ties in closely with social penetration theory.

## **Symbolic interaction**

Symbolic interaction comes from the sociocultural perspective in that it relies on the creation of shared meaning through interactions with others. This theory focuses on the ways in which people form meaning and structure in society through interactions. People are motivated to act based on the meanings they assign to people, things, and events.

Symbolic interaction argues the world is made up of social objects that are named and have socially determined meanings. When people interact over time they come to shared meaning for certain terms and actions and thus come to understand events in particular ways. There are three main concepts in this theory: society, self and mind.

Society Social acts (which create meaning) involve an initial gesture from one individual, a response to that gesture from another and a result. Self Self-image comes from interaction with others based on others perceptions.

A person makes sense of the world and defines their "self" through social interactions. One's self is a significant object and like all social objects it is defined through social interactions with others. Mind Your ability to use significant symbols to respond to yourself makes thinking possible. You define objects in terms of how you might react to them. Objects become what they are through our symbolic minding process.

Constructs for this theory include creation of meaning, social norms, human interactions, and signs and symbols. An underlying assumption for this theory is that meaning and social reality are shaped from interactions with others and that some kind of shared meaning is reached. The boundary conditions for this theory are there

must be numerous people communicating and interacting and thus assigning meaning to situations or objects.

### **Relational dialectics theory**

In order to understand relational dialectics theory, we must first understand specifically what encompasses the term discourse. Therefore, discourses are "systems of meaning that are uttered whenever we make intelligible utterances aloud with others or in our heads when we hold internal conversations". Now, taking the term discourse and coupling it with Relational Dialectics Theory, it is assumed that this theory "emerges from the interplay of competing discourses".

This theory also poses the primary assumption that, "Dialogue is simultaneously unity and difference". Therefore, these assumptions insinuate the concept of creating meaning within ourselves and others when we communicate, however, it also shows how the meanings within our conversations may be interpreted, understood, and of course misunderstood. Hence, the creation and interpretations we find in our communicative messages may create strains in our communicative acts that can be termed as 'dialectical tensions.'

So, if we assume the stance that all of our discourse, whether in external conversations or internally within ourselves, has competing properties, then we can take relational dialectics theory and look at what the competing discourses are in our conversations, and then analyze how this may have an effect on various aspects of our lives. Numerous examples of this can be seen in the daily communicative acts we participate in. However, dialectical tensions within our discourses can most likely be seen in interpersonal communication due to the close nature of interpersonal relationships. The well known proverb "opposites attract, but Birds of a feather flock together" exemplifies these dialectical tensions.

### **The three relational dialectics**

In order to understand relational dialectics theory, one must also be aware of the assumption that there are three different types of relational dialectics. These consist of connectedness and separateness, certainty and uncertainty, and openness and closedness.

## **Connectedness and separateness**

Most individuals naturally desire to have a close bond in the interpersonal relationships we are a part of. However, it is also assumed that no relationship can be enduring without the individuals involved within it also having their time alone to themselves. Individuals who are only defined by a specific relationship they are a part of can result in the loss of individual identity.

## **Certainty and uncertainty**

Individuals desire a sense of assurance and predictability in the interpersonal relationships they are a part of. However, they also desire having a variety in their interactions that come from having spontaneity and mystery within their relationships as well. Much research has shown that relationships which become bland and ..monotonous are not desirable.

## **Openness and closedness**

In close interpersonal relationships, individuals may often feel a pressure to reveal personal information. This assumption can be supported if one looks at the postulations within social penetration theory, which is another theory used often within the study of communication. This tension may also spawn a natural desire to keep an amount of personal privacy from other individuals. The struggle in this sense, illustrates the essence of relational dialectics.

## **Coordinated management of meaning**

Coordinated management of meaning is a theory assuming that two individuals engaging in an interaction are each constructing their own interpretation and perception behind what a conversation means. A core assumption within this theory includes the belief that all individuals interact based on rules that are expected to be followed while engaging in communication. "Individuals within any social situation first want to understand what is going on and apply rules to figure things out".

There are two different types of rules that individuals can apply in any communicative situation. These include constitutive and regulative rules.

Constitutive rules "are essentially rules of meaning used by communicators to interpret or understand an event or message". Regulative rules "are essentially rules of action used to determine how to respond or behave".

An example of this can be seen if one thinks of a hypothetical situation in which two individuals are engaging in conversation. If one individual sends a message to the other, the message receiver must then take that interaction and interpret what it means. Often this can be done on an almost instantaneous level because the interpretation rules applied to the situation are immediate and simple. However, there are also times when one may have to search for an appropriate interpretation of the 'rules' within an interaction. This simply depends on each communicator's previous beliefs and perceptions within a given context and how they can apply these rules to the current communicative interaction. Important to understand within the constructs of this theory is the fact that these "rules" of meaning "are always chosen within a context".[8] Furthermore, the context of a situation can be understood as a framework for interpreting specific events.

The authors of this theory believe that there are a number of different context an individual can refer to when interpreting a communicative event. These include the relationship context, the episode context, the self-concept context, and the archetype context.

Relationship context. This context assumes that there are mutual expectations between individuals who are members of a group. Episode context. This context simply refers to a specific event in which the communicative act is taking place. Self-concept context. This context involves one's sense of self, or an individual's personal 'definition' of him/herself. Archetype context. This context is essentially one's image of what his or her belief consists of regarding general truths within communicative exchanges.

Furthermore, Pearce and Cronen believe that these specific contexts exist in a hierarchical fashion. This theory assumes that the bottom level of this hierarchy consists of the communicative act. Next, the hierarchy exists within the relationship context, then the episode context, followed by the self-concept context, and finally the archetype context.

### **Social penetration theory**

Developed by Irwin Altman and Dallas Taylor, the Social Penetration Theory was made to provide conceptual framework that describes the development in interpersonal relationships. This theory refers to the reciprocity of behaviors between two people who are in the process of developing a relationship. These behaviors can vary from verbal/nonverbal exchange, interpersonal perceptions, and

ones use of the environment around them. The behaviors vary based on the different levels of intimacy that a relationship encounters.

## **"Onion Theory"**

This theory is best known as the "onion theory". This analogy suggests that like an onion, personalities have "layers" that start from the outside (what the public sees) all the way to the core (ones private self). Often, when a relationship begins to develop, it is customary for the individuals within the relationship to undergo a process of self-disclosure. As people divulge information about themselves their "layers" begin to peel, and once those "layers" peel away they cannot go back; just like you can't put the layers back on an onion.

There are four different stages that social penetration theory encompasses. These stages include the orientation, exploratory affective exchange, affective exchange, and stable exchange.

**Orientation stage**At first, strangers exchange very little amounts of information and they are very cautious in their interactions.**Exploratory affective stage**Next, individuals become somewhat more friendly and relaxed with their communication styles.**Affective exchange**In the third stage, there is a high amount of open communication between individuals and typically these relationships consist of close friends or even romantic partners.**Stable stage**The final stage, simply consists of continued expressions of open and personal types of interaction.

If a person speeds through the stages and happens to share too much information too fast, the receiver may view that interaction as negative and a relationship between the two is less likely to form.

**Example-** Jenny just met Justin because they were sitting at the same table at a wedding. Within minutes of meeting one another, Justin engages in small talk with Jenny. Jenny decides to tell Justin all about her terrible ex-boyfriend and all of the misery he put her through. This is the kind of information you wait to share until stages three or four, not stage one. Due to the fact that Jenny told Justin much more than he wanted to know, he probably views her in a negative aspect and thinks she is crazy, which will most likely prevent any future relationship from happening.

Altman and Taylor believed the social exchange theory principles could accurately predict whether or not people will risk self-disclosure. The principles included,



relational outcome, relational stability, and relational satisfaction. This theory assumes that the possible outcome is the stance that which the decision making process of how much information an individual chooses to self disclose is rooted by weighing out the costs and rewards that an individual may acquire when choosing to share personal information. Due to ethical egoism, individuals try to maximize their pleasure and minimize their pain; acting from the motive of self-interest. If a person is more of a hassle to you than an asset, it is more likely that you will dispose of them as a friend because it is decreasing the amount of pleasure in your life.

An example of the social penetration theory can be seen when one thinks of a hypothetical situation such as meeting someone for the first time. The depth of penetration is the degree of intimacy a relationship has accomplished. When two individuals meet for the first time, it is the cultural expectation that only impersonal information will be exchanged. This could include information such as names, occupations, age of the conversation participants, as well as various other impersonal information. However, if both members participating in the dialogic exchange decide that they would like to continue or further the relationship; with the continuation of message exchanges, the more personal the information exchanged will become. Altman and Taylor defined these as the depth and breadth of self-disclosure. According to Griffin, the definition of depth is "the degree of disclosure in a specific area of an individual's life" and the definition of breadth is "the range of areas in an individual's life over which disclosure takes place."

Altman and Taylor discussed the process of four observations that are the reasons a relationship occurs:

1. Peripheral items are exchanged more frequently and sooner than private information
2. Self-disclosure is reciprocal, especially in the early stages of relationship development
3. Penetration is rapid at the start but slows down quickly as the tightly wrapped inner layers are reached
4. Depenetration is a gradual process of layer-by-layer withdrawal.

## **"Computer Mediated Social Penetration"**

Also important to note, is the fact that due to current communicative exchanges involving a high amount of computer mediated contexts in which communication occurs, this area of communication should be addressed in regard to Social Penetration Theory as well. Online communication seems to follow a different set of rules. Because much of online communication between people occurs on an anonymous level, individuals are allowed the freedom of foregoing the interpersonal 'rules' of self disclosure. Rather than slowly disclosing personal thoughts, emotions, and feelings to others, anonymous individuals online are able to disclose personal information immediately and without the consequence of having their identity revealed. Ledbetter notes that Facebook users self-disclose by posting personal information, pictures, hobbies, and messages. The study finds that the user's level of self-disclosure is directly related to the level of interdependence on others. This may result in negative psychological and relational outcomes as studies show that people are more likely to disclose more personal information than they would in face to face communication, primarily due to the heightened level of control within the context of the online communication medium. In other words, those with poor social skills may prefer the medium of Facebook to show others who they are because they have more control. This may lead to an avoidance of face-to-face communication, which is undoubtedly harmful to interpersonal relationships. The reason that self disclosure is labeled as risky, is because, individuals often undergo a sense of uncertainty and susceptibility in revealing personal information that has the possibility of being judged in a negative way by the receiver. Hence the reason that face-to-face communication must evolve in stages when an initial relationship develops.

## **Relational patterns of interaction theory**

Relational Patterns of Interaction Theory of the cybernetic tradition, studies how relationships are defined by peoples' interaction during communication. Gregory Bateson, Paul Watzlawick, et al. laid the groundwork for this theory and went on to become known as the Palo Alto Group. Their theory became the foundation from which scholars in the field of communication approached the study of relationships.

## **Ubiquitous communication**

The Palo Alto Group maintains that a person's presence alone results in them, consciously or not, expressing things about themselves and their relationships with others (i.e., communicating). A person cannot avoid interacting, and even if they do, their avoidance may be read as a statement by others. This ubiquitous interaction leads to the establishment of "expectations" and "patterns" which are used to determine and explain relationship types.

## **Expectations**

Individuals enter communication with others having established expectations for their own behavior as well as the behavior of those they are communicating with. These expectations are either reinforced during the interaction, or new expectations are established which will be used in future interactions. These new expectations are created by new patterns of interaction, established expectations are a result of established patterns of interaction.

## **Patterns of interaction**

Established patterns of interaction are created when a trend occurs regarding how two people interact with each other. There are two patterns of particular importance to the theory which form two kinds of relationships.

## **Symmetrical relationships**

These relationships are established when the pattern of interaction is defined by two people responding to one and other in the same way. This is a common pattern of interaction within power struggles.

## **Complementary relationships**

These relationships are established when the pattern of interaction is defined by two people responding to one and other in opposing ways. An example of such a relationship would be when one person is argumentative while the other is quiet.

## **Relational control**

Relational control refers to who, within a relationship, is in control of it. The pattern of behavior between partners over time, not any individual's behavior, defines the control within a relationship. Patterns of behavior involve individuals' responses to others' assertions.

There are three kinds of responses:

One-down responses are submissive to, or accepting of, another's assertions.

One-up responses are in opposition to, or counter, another's assertions.

One-across responses are neutral in nature.

Seth Weiss and Marian Houser add to relational control in a teacher/student context. "Students communicating with instructors for relational purposes hope to develop or maintain a personal relationship; functional reasons aim to seek more information presented and discussed by instructors; students communicating to explain a lack of responsibility utilize an excuse-making motive; participatory motives demonstrate understanding and interest in the class or course material; and students communicating for sycophantic purposes hope to make a favorable impression on their instructor."

### **Complementary exchanges**

A complementary exchange occurs when a partner asserts a one-up message which the other partner responds to with a one-down response. When complementary exchanges are frequently occurring within a relationship, and the parties at each end of the exchange tend to remain uniform, it is a good indication of a complementary relationship existing.

### **Symmetrical exchanges**

Symmetrical exchanges occur when one partner's assertion is countered with a reflective response. So, when a one-up assertion is met with a one-up response, or when a one-down assertions is met with a one-down response, a symmetrical exchange occurs. When symmetrical exchanges are frequently occurring within a relationship, it is a good indication of a symmetrical relationship existing.

### **Identity management theory**

Falling under the Socio-Cultural tradition and developed by Tadasu Todd Imahori and William R. Cupach, identity-management theory explains the establishment, development, and maintenance of identities within relationships, as well as changes which occur to identities due to relationships.

## **Establishing identities**

People establish their identities (or faces), and their partners, through a process referred to as "facework". Everyone has a desired identity which they're constantly working towards establishing. This desired identity can be both threatened and supported by attempting to negotiate a relational identity (the identity one shares with their partner). So, our desired identity is directly influenced by our relationships, and our relational identity by our desired individual identity.

## **Cultural influence**

Identity-management pays significant attention to intercultural relationships and how they affect the relational and individual identities of those involved. How partners of different cultures negotiate with each other, in an effort to satisfy desires for adequate autonomous identities and relational identities, is important to identity-management theory. People take different approaches to coping with this problem of cultural influence.

## **Tensions within intercultural relationships**

Identity freezing occurs when one partner feels like they're being stereotyped and not recognized as a complex individual. This tends to occur early on in relationships, prior to partners becoming well acquainted with each other, and threatens individuals' identities. Showing support for oneself, indicating positive aspects of one's cultural identity, and having a good sense of humor are examples of coping mechanisms used by people who feel their identities are being frozen. It is also not uncommon for people in such positions to react negatively, and cope by stereotyping their partner, or totally avoiding the tension.

When tension is due to a partner feeling that their cultural identity is being ignored it is referred to as a nonsupport problem. This is a threat to one's face, and individuals often cope with it in the same ways people cope with identity freezing.

Self-other faceground, giving in, alternating in their support of each identity, and also by avoiding the issue completely.

## **Relational stages of identity management**

Identity management is an ongoing process which Imahori and Cupach define as having three relational stages. Typically, each stage is dealt with differently by couples.

The trial stage occurs at the beginning of an intercultural relationship when partners are beginning to explore their cultural differences. During this stage each partner is attempting to determine what cultural identities they want for the relationship. At this stage cultural differences are significant barriers to the relationship and it is critical for partners to avoid identity freezing and nonsupport. During this stage individuals are more willing to risk face threats to establish a balance necessary for the relationship.

The enmeshment stage occurs when a relational identity emerges with established common cultural features. During this stage the couple becomes more comfortable with their collective identity and the relationship in general.

The renegotiation stage sees couples working through identity issues and drawing on their past relational history while doing so. A strong relational identity has been established by this stage and couples have mastered dealing with cultural differences. It is at this stage that cultural difference become part of the relationships and not a tension within them.

### **Communication privacy management theory**

Of the socio-cultural tradition, communication privacy management theory is concerned with how people negotiate openness and privacy in concern to communicated information. This theory focuses on how people in relationships manage boundaries which separate the public from the private.

#### **Boundaries**

An individual's private information is protected by the individual's boundaries. The permeability of these boundaries are ever changing, and allow certain parts of the public, access to certain pieces of information belonging to the individual. This sharing occurs only when the individual has weighed their need to share the information against their need to protect themselves. This risk assessment is used by couples when evaluating their relationship boundaries. The disclosure of private information to a partner may result in greater intimacy, but it may also result in the discloser becoming more vulnerable.

## **Co-ownership of information**

When someone chooses to reveal private information to another person they are making that person a co-owner of the information. Co-ownership comes with rules, responsibilities, and rights which the discloser of the information and receiver of it negotiate. Examples of such rules would be: Can the information be disclosed? When can the information be disclosed? To whom can the information be disclosed? And how much of the information can be disclosed? The negotiation of these rules can be complex, the rules can be explicit as well as implicit, and they can be violated.

## **Boundary turbulence**

What Petronio refers to as "boundary turbulence" occurs when rules are not mutually understood by co-owners, and when a co-owner of information deliberately violates the rules. This usually results in some kind of conflict, is not uncommon, and often results in one party becoming more apprehensive about future revelation of information to the violator.

## **Cognitive dissonance theory**

The theory of cognitive dissonance, part of the Cybernetic Tradition, explains how humans are consistency seekers and attempt to reduce their dissonance, or discomfort, in new situations. The theory was developed in the 1950s by Leon Festinger.

When individuals encounter new information or new experiences they categorize the information based on their preexisting attitudes, thoughts, and beliefs. If the new encounter does not coincide with their preexisting assumptions, then dissonance is likely to occur. When dissonance does occur, individuals are motivated to reduce the dissonance they experience by avoiding situations that would either cause the dissonance or increase the dissonance. For this reason, cognitive dissonance is considered a drive state that encourages motivation to achieve consonance and reduce dissonance. An example of cognitive dissonance would be if someone holds the belief that maintaining a healthy lifestyle is important, but they don't regularly work out or eat healthy, they may experience dissonance between their beliefs and their actions. If there is a significant amount of dissonance, they may be motivated to change their attitudes and work out more or eat healthier foods. They may also be inclined to avoid situations that will point out the fact that their attitudes and beliefs are inconsistent, such as avoiding the gym or not reading health reports.

## **The selection process**

Selective exposure is a method for reducing dissonance that only seeking information that is consonant with one's current beliefs, thoughts, or actions. Selective attention is a method for reducing dissonance by only paying attention to particular information or parts of information that is consonant with current beliefs, thoughts, or actions. Selective interpretation is a method for reducing dissonance by interpreting ambiguous information so that it seems consistent with one's beliefs, thoughts, or actions. Selective retention when an individual only remembers information that is consistent with their current beliefs.

## **Types of cognitive relationships**

According to cognitive dissonance theory there are three types of cognitive relationships: consonant relationships, dissonant relationships, and irrelevant relationships. Consonant relationships are when two elements, such as your beliefs and actions, are in equilibrium with each other or coincide. Dissonant relationships are when two elements are not in equilibrium and cause dissonance. Irrelevant relationships are when two elements do not possess a meaningful relationship with one another, they are unrelated and do not cause dissonance.

## **Attribution theory**

Attribution theory is part of the sociopsychological tradition and explains how individuals go through a process that makes inferences about observed behavior. Attribution theory assumes that we make attributions, or social judgments, as a way to clarify or predict behavior. Attribution theory assumes that we are sense-making creatures and that we draw conclusions of the actions that we observe.

## **Steps to the attribution process**

1. The first step of the attribution process is to observe the behavior or action.
2. The second step is to make judgments of interactions and the intention of that particular action.
3. The last step of the attribution process is making the attribution which will be either internal, where the cause is related to the person, or external, where the cause of the action is circumstantial.



An example of this process is when a student fails a test, an observer may choose to attribute that action to 'internal' causes, such as insufficient study, laziness, or have a poor work ethic. The action might also be attributed to 'external' factors such as the difficulty of the test, or real-world stressors that led to distraction.

We also make attributions of our own behavior. Using this same example, if it were you who received a failing test score you might either make an internal attribution, such as "I just can't understand this material", or you could make an external attribution, such as "this test was just too difficult."

### **Fundamental attribution error**

As we make attributions, we may fall victim to the fundamental attribution error which is when we overemphasize internal attributions for others and underestimate external attributions.

### **Actor-observer bias**

Similar to the fundamental attribution error, we may overestimate external attributions for our own behavior and underestimate internal attributions.

### **Expectancy violations theory**

Expectancy violations theory is part of the sociopsychological tradition, and explains the relationship between non-verbal message production and the interpretations people hold for those non-verbal behaviors. Individuals hold certain expectations for non-verbal behavior that is based on the social norms, past experience and situational aspects of that behavior. When expectations are either met or violated, we make assumptions of the behavior and judge them to be positive or negative.

### **Arousal**

When a deviation of expectations occurs there is an increased interest in the situation, also known as arousal. There are two types of arousal:

Cognitive arousal mental awareness of expectancy deviations  
Physical arousal challenges our body faces as a result of expectancy deviations.

## **Reward valence**

When an expectation is not met, we hold particular perceptions as to whether or not that violation is considered rewarding. How an individual evaluates the interaction will determine how they view the positive or negative impact of the violation.

## **Proxemics**

A significant focus of expectancy violations theory is the concept of proxemics, or the study of individual use of personal space. There are four types of proxemic zones:

Intimate distance 0–10 inches  
Personal distance 38 inches – 64 feet  
Social distance 54–82 feet  
Public distance 32 feet or more

## **Dyadic communication and Relationships**

Dyadic communication is the part of a relationship that calls for "something to happen". Partners will either talk or argue with one another during this point of a relationship to bring about change. When partners talk or argue with one another the relationship may still survive at this point.

Bochner (2000) stresses inherent dialectic in interpersonal communication as the key to healthy marital dyads. He proposes that people in intimate relationships are looking to find an equilibrium point between needing to be open with their partner and needing to protect their partner from the consequences of this openness. Therefore, the communication in romantic, long-term relationships can be viewed as a balance between hiding and revealing. Taking this theory even further, communication within marriages can be viewed as a continuing refinement and elimination of conversational material. The partners of the marriage will still have things to discuss, but as their relationship and communication grows, they can decide when to not speak about an issue, because in complex relationships like marriage, anything can become an issue.

## **Conflict resolution**

Sillars (1380) and Roloff (1876) expressed that conflict resolution strategies can be categorized as pro-social or anti-social in nature. When an individual is presented with an interpersonal conflict, they can decide how they want to deal with it. They can avoid (anti-social), compete (anti-social), or cooperate (pro-social). It has been learned that one who avoids conflict is less capable of solving problems because they are more constricted. Avoidance has negative effects on dyads.

## **The Couples Coping Enhancement Training (CCET)**

This program is based on stress, coping, and research on dyads (Bodenmann, 1997a; 2000b). The focus is on individual and dyadic coping to help promote satisfaction within marriage and to help reduce distress within marriages. CCET states three important factors for dyads being successful when they enter counseling programs. Firstly, the dyad's ability to cope with daily stress is a main factor in determining the success or failure of their relationship. Couples need to be educated about ways to manage daily stress so that this stress is not placed on their partner or on their relationship. Secondly, couples who enter counseling to help their relationship must stay in counseling to continue to get reinforcement and encourage about practicing their new methods of communication. Continued counseling will help the couple to maintain their new strategies. Lastly, couples should make use of technology within their counseling. They should use the Internet and seek help online in addition to their counseling program. Having technology that can help couples with immediate problems is a very useful thing.

## **Parenting**

Many theorists have studied how the relationship between the husband and wife greatly affects the relationship between the parent and child (Belsky, 1990; Parke & Tinsley, 1987). There have been numerous studies done that show how difficult it is to maintain a positive and healthy parent-child relationship when the marriage between the parents is failing. "Spillover," emotional transmission from one family relationship to another, is a likely explanation as to why parents have trouble fostering a good relationship with their children when there are problems within their marriage (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Wethington, 1989; Repetti, 1987).

## **New Parenthood and Marital Quality:**

New parenthood is a time where there are many adjustments within a family and these adjustments can put a lot of stress on marital dyads. How a couple deals with first-time parenthood directly correlates to their marital satisfaction, amount of conflict within their marriage, and the perceptions of themselves (Glade, Bean, & Vira, 2005). Studies show that transitioning into parenting leads to more marital conflicts and less marital satisfaction. When marital dyads have a child, their once dyadic dynamic relationships quickly changes to a triadic relationship, creating a shift in roles. New topics for discussion between the married couple, such as household labor, finances, and child care responsibilities, can lead to major conflicts.

It is important for couples to identify ways that may help them maintain marital satisfaction while coping with becoming parents.

### **Teaching**

Good communication between teachers and young students is thought to improve the test scores of the students. Some parents of students at The William T. Harris School were interviewed and stated that they can tell how good a teacher is just by watching them in the classroom setting. Observing how teachers talk to their students and how they promote communication between their students can lead to conclusions about how well these students will score on standardized tests. Parents of students at The William T. Harris School have admitted that they do not always trust the publicized rankings of teachers, however, they stated that there are strong similarities between their children's grades and their impressions of their children's teachers.