INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

What’s To Come

» The Nature of Intimate Relationships
» Characteristics of Romantic Relationships
» Forming and Communicating in Romantic Relationships
» Communicating in Families
» Improving Communication in Intimate Relationships

The Nature of Intimate Relationships
The Nature of Intimate Relationships

Intimate relationships require deep commitment
- Commitment is the desire to stay in a relationship no matter what happens.

The Nature of Intimate Relationships

- Commitment takes several forms
  - Emotional commitment
  - Social commitment
  - Legal commitment
  - Financial commitment
The Nature of Intimate Relationships

» Intimate relationships require deep commitment

- What do you think about pre-nuptual agreements?
- How would you react if your partner asked for a pre-nup before saying “I do”?

The Nature of Intimate Relationships

» Intimate relationships foster interdependence

- What happens to one person affects everyone else in the relationship
- Positive intimate relationships usually have high interdependence

The Nature of Intimate Relationships

» Intimate relationships require continuous investment

- Investment is the commitment of resources to a relationship
- People in intimate relationships are often aware of how much they invest
The Nature of Intimate Relationships

- Intimate relationships spark dialectical tensions
  - **Dialectical tensions** are conflicts between two important but opposing needs
    - Autonomy versus connection
    - Openness versus closedness
    - Predictability versus novelty
    - Spontaneity versus planning

Characteristics of Romantic Relationships

- Some romantic relationships emphasize exclusivity
  - **Monogamy** means being in only one romantic relationship at a time and avoiding romantic involvement with others outside the relationship
  - **Infidelity** means having romantic interaction with someone outside of one’s “committed” romantic relationship

Characteristics of Romantic Relationships

- Most romantic relationships attempt to emphasize voluntariness
  - Many people expect to choose for themselves whether to be romantically involved, and with whom
  - Some cultures still have “arranged marriages”
  - Even if people enter a romantic relationship voluntarily, they do not always stay in it voluntarily
Characteristics of Romantic Relationships

Some romantic relationships emphasize love
- Much of the Western world thinks of romantic relationships as being based on love
- People sometimes enter romantic relationships for financial stability or power

Characteristics of Romantic Relationships

Same- and opposite-sex romantic relationships
- Both types of relationships communicate similarly
- Same-sex romantic relationships are not legally recognized in most of the world

Acceptance is Growing for Same-Sex Marriages

June 24, 2011, Governor Andrew Cuomo signs into law the Marriage Equality Act
Characteristics of Romantic Relationships

- Expectations for romantic relationships vary around the world
  - Expectations for exclusiveness
  - Expectations for voluntariness
  - Expectations for love
  - Expectations for sexuality

Forming and Communicating in Romantic Relationships

- Communications Scholar Mark Knapp’s 5-stage model of relationship development
  - Initiating
  - Experimenting
  - Intensifying
  - Integrating
  - Bonding

- Stages can vary across cultures and online

Forming and Communicating in Romantic Relationships

- Romantic relationships vary in how they handle conflict
  - Validating couples discuss disagreements openly and cooperatively
  - Volatile couples discuss disagreements openly but competitively
  - Conflict-avoiding couples discuss disagreements covertly rather than openly (ie. passive-aggressive)
  - Hostile couples have frequent, intense conflict
Romantic relationships vary in how they handle privacy.

**Communication Privacy Management Theory**

- Partners in a couple jointly own the information about their relationship.
- We form and manage privacy boundaries.

Romantic relationships vary in how they handle emotional communication.

- Happy partners share more positive emotion and less negative emotion than do unhappy partners.
- Unhappy partners are more likely than happy partners to reciprocate expressions of negative emotion.

“*I hate you.*” “*I hate you, too*”
Romantic relationships vary in how they handle instrumental communication:
- Day-to-day tasks require completion
- The way in which partners divide everyday tasks often reflects the balance of power in their relationship.

Knapp’s five-stage model of relationship dissolution includes:
- Differentiating
- Circumscribing
- Stagnating
- Avoiding
- Terminating

What makes a family?
- Genetic ties
- Legal obligations
- Role behaviors
Communicating in Families

Families come in various types
- Family of origin
- Family of procreation
- Nuclear family
- Blended family
- Single-parent family

Families enact roles
- Family roles are the functions people serve in the family system
- Four roles commonly emerge during conflict
  - Blamer
  - Placater
  - Computer
  - Distracter

Families enact rituals
- Family rituals are repetitive activities that have special meaning for a family
- Some family rituals are “imported” from families into blended families
Communicating in Families

» Families tell stories
  • Family stories give families a sense of their history, their expectations, and their connections
  • Family web pages often embody a family’s stories

Communicating in Families

» Families share secrets
  • Some families have secrets they intentionally keep hidden from others
  • Secrets can also be kept within families

Improving Communication in Intimate Relationships

» Emphasize excitement and positivity
  • Sharing common, enjoyable activities increases relationship satisfaction
  • Using confirming messages emphasizes positivity
Improving Communication in Intimate Relationships

» Handle conflict constructively
  • Four conflict behaviors are especially destructive
    » Criticism
    » Contempt
    » Defensiveness
    » Stonewalling

» Have realistic expectations
  • It’s rare that one person — even a spouse — can meet all of your social and emotional needs
  • Remember that the important people in your life are important for different reasons

For Review

» What makes some relationships intimate?
» How do we form, maintain, and dissolve romantic relationships?
» What makes a family, and how do we communicate in families?