

# Chapter 9: Understanding Interpersonal Relationships

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 9.1 Define interpersonal relationships and identify two ways to distinguish among them.
- 9.2 Identify and differentiate between short-term initial attraction and long-term maintenance attraction.
- 9.3 Identify and describe the stages of relational escalation and de-escalation.
- 9.4 Describe the main components of the three theories that explain relational development.

## CHAPTER OUTLINE

### I. Interpersonal Relationships Defined

**Learning Objective 9.1: Define interpersonal relationships and identify two ways to distinguish among them.**

- A. A **relationship** is a connection you establish when you communicate with another person. An **interpersonal relationship** is a perception shared by two people of an ongoing connection that results in the development of relational expectations and varies in interpersonal intimacy.
- B. **Shared Perception**
  - 1. Both individuals must share a perception that they have an ongoing relationship.
  - 2. Having a shared perception means interpersonal relationships are **transactional**; that is, both partners perceive the relationships similarly.
- C. **Ongoing Interdependent Connection**
  - 1. As a process, the relationship is **dynamic**, constantly changing and evolving.
  - 2. Being interdependent means each partner relies fairly equally on the other to meet needs.
- D. **Relational Expectations**
  - 1. As you develop an interpersonal relationship, you and your partner establish expectations specific to that relationship.
  - 2. At times, **expectations are violated, which can create turmoil** in the relationship.
  - 3. When something unexpected happens in an intimate relationship, you will probably use direct information-seeking to reduce your uncertainty.
- E. **Interpersonal Intimacy**
  - 1. **Interpersonal intimacy** is the **degree** to which relational partners **mutually accept and confirm each other's sense of self**.
  - 2. We depend on intimate relationships to provide us with information about ourselves and to bolster our **self-confidence**.
  - 3. According to sociologist Derek Layder, intimacy is fed by mutual attention to a partner's needs for **self-esteem** and security.
  - 4. We communicate our sense of intimacy to others both directly, **through our words, and indirectly, through actions**.

F. **Circumstance or Choice**

1. **Relationships of circumstance** are interpersonal relationships that exist because of life circumstances (e.g., who your family members are, where you work or study, and so on).
2. **Relationships of choice** are interpersonal relationships you choose to initiate, maintain, and, perhaps, terminate.
3. **We act and communicate differently in these two types of relationships because the stakes are different.**
4. These categories are not mutually exclusive—relationships of circumstance can also be relationships of choice.

G. **Power**

1. **Complementary Relationships**
  - a. A **complementary relationship** is a relationship in which power is divided unevenly, with one partner dominating and the other submitting.
2. **Competitive and Submissive Symmetrical Relationships**
  - a. In **symmetrical relationships**, both partners behave toward power in the same way, either both wanting power or both avoiding it.
  - b. A **competitive symmetrical relationship** exists when **both partners are vying for power and control of decision making.**
  - c. A **submissive symmetrical relationship** exists when **neither partner wants** to take control or make decisions.
3. **Parallel Relationships**
  - a. Most relationships are **parallel relationships**, where in which power shifts back and forth between the partners, depending on the situation.

II. Genesis of Interpersonal Relationships: Attraction

**Learning Objective 9.2: Identify and differentiate between short-term initial attraction and long-term maintenance attraction.**

- A. Attraction acts as the genesis or beginning of interpersonal relationships. **Interpersonal attraction** is the degree to which you want to form or maintain an interpersonal relationship.
1. Interpersonal attraction occurs in the early stage of relational development as **short-term initial attraction**; the degree to which **we sense a potential for developing an interpersonal relationship**, and you may or may not act on this attraction. Short-term attraction acts as **the impetus to communicate interpersonally.**
  2. **Long-term maintenance attraction** is the degree of liking or positive feelings that **motivate us to maintain or escalate a relationship.** Through interpersonal communication, self-disclosure, and continued interactions, we learn information about others that either fosters or diminishes our long-term maintenance attraction to them.
  3. According to Michael Sunnafrank's theory of predicted outcome value (POV), we assess the potential for a relationship to confirm our self-image compared to its potential costs.

4. Communication and Attraction
  - a. Short-term initial attraction acts as the impetus to communicate interpersonally.
  - b. The resulting interpersonal communication provides additional information that might contribute to long-term maintenance attraction.

#### B. Sources of Initial Attraction

1. **Proximity**
  - a. **Proximity** refers to the physical nearness to another that promotes communication and thus attraction.
  - b. Any circumstance that increases the possibilities for interacting is also likely to increase attraction.
2. **Physical Appearance**
  - a. **Physical appearance** refers to the nonverbal cues that provide us with information that helps us assess relationship potential (predicted value outcome).
  - b. Physical attraction is also judged online in the way of an attractive photo, and unattractive photo, or no photo at all.
  - c. Positive social interactions and increased liking of another appear to increase how physically attractive that person appears to others.
  - d. Sexual attraction also influences interest in forming relationships.
  - e. In cross-sex romantic relationships, the evolutionary theory of mate selection suggests that men and women use physical appearance to determine the adequacy of potential mates.

#### C. Sources of Both Initial and Long-Term Attraction

1. **Competence**
  - a. **Competence** is the quality of being skilled, intelligent, charismatic, and credible.
  - b. Intelligence and competence are more important predictors of initial attraction in eventual romantic relationships than in friendships.
  - c. We find people credible if they display a blend of enthusiasm, trustworthiness, competence, and power.
2. **Self-Disclosure**
  - a. As relationships progress from initiation to intimacy, further openness increases attraction.
  - b. Self-disclosing needs to be appropriate for the level of relational intimacy.
3. **Reciprocation of Liking**
  - a. **Reciprocation of liking** is liking the people who like us.
  - b. Displaying attraction toward another person seems to have the greatest impact if it is perceived by the other person as being uniquely directed toward him or her.
  - c. We may protect ourselves—"save face"—by assuming the other person does not like us much.
4. **Similarities**
  - a. We are attracted to people on the basis of **similarity**—we like people who have comparable personalities, values, upbringing, personal experience, attitudes, and interests to ours.
  - b. In the initial stages of a relationship, we try to create a positive and attractive image.
  - c. The main reason for placing a positive value on similarity is that it facilitates communication.

SCIENCE !

SCIENCE !

5. **Differences and Complementary Needs**
  - a. People who are different from us expose us to new ideas, activities, and perspectives and prompt self-assessment, but differences can also lead to conflict.
  - b. **Complementary needs** are needs that match; each partner contributes something to the relationship that the other partner needs.

### III. Stages of Interpersonal Relationship Development

**Learning Objective 9.3: Identify and describe the stages of relational escalation and de-escalation.**

A. **Relational development** is movement of a relationship from one stage to another, either toward or away from greater intimacy.

#### B. Relational Escalation

1. **Relational escalation** is the movement of a relationship toward greater intimacy through five stages: preinteraction awareness, acquaintance, exploration, intensification, and intimacy.
2. **Preinteraction Awareness**
  - a. At this stage you might observe someone or even talk with others about him or her without having any direct interaction; getting information from others about them is a “passive” strategy.
3. **Acquaintance**
  - a. From the impression you formed in the preinteraction awareness stage, you might decide to interact with the other person; interaction is generally superficial.
  - b. In the **introductions** sub-stage, interaction is routine and basic information is shared.
  - c. The second sub-stage is **casual banter**, which consists of talking about impersonal topics with little or no self-disclosure.
3. **Exploration**
  - a. This stage is when you both begin to share more in-depth information about yourselves, but you will have little physical contact, maintain your social distance, and limit the amount of time you spend together.
4. **Intensification**
  - a. At this stage you will start to depend on each other for self-confirmation and engage in more risky self-disclosure and you will spend more time together, increase the variety of activities you share, decrease physical distance, and personalize your language; you may also “define” the relationship.
5. **Intimacy**
  - a. At this stage the two partners turn to each other for confirmation and acceptance of their selves; communication is highly personalized and synchronized.

### **In-Text Opportunity for Classroom Discussion**

#### **Improving Your Communication Skills: Graphing Your Relationship Changes**

This feature asks students to think about one interpersonal relationship that they have had for a year. On the graph provided, students plot their estimated time spent at each of the relationship escalation stages. Afterward, have students work in small groups to compare their graphs and engage in a discussion about how different interpersonal relationships develop.

### C. Relational De-Escalation

1. **Relational de-escalation** is the movement that occurs when a relationship decreases in intimacy or comes to an end. This is not just a reversal of the relationship formation process. A **post-intimacy relationship** occurs when partners de-escalate from the intimate stage but still maintain a relationship.
2. **Turmoil or Stagnation**
  - a. This stage is when an intimate relationship is not going well.
  - b. **Turmoil involves an increase in conflict and the definition of the relationship seems to lose its clarity, and mutual acceptance declines.**
  - c. Stagnation occurs when the relationship loses its vitality and the partners become complacent.
  - d. At this stage the partners in a **stagnating relationship tend to go through the motions of an intimate relationship without the commitment.**
3. **Deintensification**
  - a. In this stage the partners **decrease their interactions, increase their physical, emotional, and psychological distance, and decrease their dependence on the other for self-confirmation.**
4. **Individualization**
  - a. Here the partners tend to **define their lives more as individuals and less as a couple, and the perspective changes from “we” and “us” to “you” and “me.”**
5. **Separation**
  - a. In the separation stage, individuals **make an intentional decision to eliminate or minimize further interpersonal interaction.**
  - b. **Partners will divide property, resources, and friends.**
  - c. Circumstances such as attending the same classes, working in the same office, or sharing the same circle of friends and activities might lead to continued contact with an “ex.”
6. **Post-separation Effects**
  - a. Although the partners may not interact any longer, the effect of the relationship is not over.
  - b. In this final stage we engage in **“grave-dressing”; we create a public statement for people who ask why we broke up and also come to grips with losing the relationship.**

### D. Principles Underlying Relational Stages

1. **You can choose to remain in a given relational stage.**
2. Speed of progressing through the stages varies.
3. Changes in relationships are signaled.
  - a. **Turning points** are specific events or interactions that signal positive or negative changes in a relationship.
  - b. A **causal turning point** is an event that directly affects the relationship, such as when a significant lie from a friend causes you to end the relationship.
  - c. A **reflective turning point** signals a change that has occurred in the definition of the relationship.

4. Change occurs within each stage.
5. Change occurs between stages.
6. Movement through the stages can be forward, backward, or on-again/off-again.
7. **Relational development involves negotiating change.**

#### **IV. Theories of Interpersonal Relationship Development** NEXT CLASS . . .

##### **Learning Objective 9.4: Describe the main components of the three theories that explain relational development.**

- A. **Filtering** is a process of reducing the number of partners at each stage of relational development by applying selection criteria.
- B. Social Exchange Theory
  1. **Social exchange theory** suggests that people make relationship decisions by assessing and comparing the costs and rewards; we seek the greatest reward for the lowest cost.
    - a. Rewards are the positive outcomes we receive by being in the relationship.
    - b. Costs are negative outcomes that reflect a loss, such as a loss of time or a loss of freedom.
    - c. Rewards and costs affect our decisions to escalate, maintain, or terminate a relationship.
  2. Immediate and Forecasted Rewards and Costs
    - a. Relationships can be evaluated in terms of immediate, forecasted, and cumulative rewards and costs.
    - b. **Immediate rewards and costs** are the rewards and costs associated with a relationship at the present moment.
    - c. **Forecasted rewards and costs** are the rewards and costs that an individual assumes will occur, based on projection and prediction.
  3. Cumulative Rewards and Costs
    - a. **Cumulative rewards and costs** are those accrued during a relationship.
    - b. You create a relational savings account of extra rewards accrued in a relationship. You can draw on that savings account during times when the relationship is not going well.
  4. Expected Rewards and Costs
    - a. **Expected rewards and costs** are expectations of how much reward we “should” get from a given relationship in relation to its costs.
    - b. We develop a mental model (or ideal type) of our best friend, ideal lover, coworker, etc. We use this imagery to assess current relationships.
  5. Comparison to Alternatives
    - a. We also compare our current relationship to the rewards and costs we forecast for other potential relationships.
    - b. We compare our current relationships to previous ones, to the ideal, and to potential ones.

### C. Relational Dialectics Theory

1. **Relational dialectics theory** views relational management as the management of tensions that are pulling us in two directions at the same time (connectedness-autonomy; predictability-novelty; and openness-closedness).
2. Identifying Dialectical Tensions
  - a. Connectedness versus Autonomy: We desire to connect with others and to become interdependent, and at the same time we have a desire to remain autonomous and independent.
  - b. Predictability versus Novelty (Certainty versus Uncertainty): Knowing what to expect reduces uncertainty. However, we are bored by constant repetition and are therefore attracted to novelty and the unexpected.
  - c. Openness versus Closedness: We wish to disclose information to others and to hear those we are attracted to disclose to us. In a way, we want total openness with our partners. On the other hand, we value our privacy and feel compelled to hold back information.
3. Using Dialectical Tensions to Explain Relational Movement
  - a. According to dialectical theory, each pair of tensions is present in every relationship, but the impact of each changes as a relationship progresses.
  - b. Movement in relationships can be seen as a shift that occurs because of more pull from one of the two forces in tension.
  - c. There is a similarity to social exchange theory, in that you weigh costs (giving up autonomy) against rewards (becoming connected).
  - d. Movement in relationships is seen to occur because some element of tension has been resolved or overcome.
4. Coping with Dialectical Tensions (Praxis)
  - a. There are strategies for dealing with the connectedness-autonomy tension, including denial and disorientation, cyclic alternation, segmentation, moderation, recalibration, and reframing.
  - b. Being in relationships means you are in a constant state of dialectical tension and you must develop and apply various coping strategies if the relationships are to succeed.

### **In-Text Opportunity for Classroom Discussion**

#### **#communicationandtechnology: Do Cell Phones Threaten Your Autonomy?**

This feature includes research about the history of cell phone use and the frequency of college students who own and use cell phones. Hold a class discussion about how the advent of cell phones has changed the expectations that others hold about communication within a relationship.

### D. Self-Disclosure and Social Penetration Theory

1. The main premise of **social penetration theory** is that the movement toward intimacy is connected to increased breadth and depth of self-disclosing.

2. Understanding the Social Penetration Model
  - a. The **social penetration model** starts with a circle that represents all of the potential information about yourself that you could disclose to someone.
  - b. This circle is divided into many pieces like a pie, with each piece of pie representing a particular aspect of yourself, and these pieces represent the **breadth** of information available about you.
  - c. The **depth** refers to how personal or intimate the information is.
  - d. Social penetration is like an onion, where each layer of the onion is peeled away as you move toward the onion core.
3. Enhancing Intimacy by Self-Disclosing Over Time
  - a. Simply disclosing information about yourself is no guarantee that your relationship will become intimate.
  - b. As we mutually self-disclose, we often discover incompatibilities or even negative information, which may lead to relational de-escalation.
  - c. Typically, a large amount of low-risk self-disclosure takes place in the early stages of relational development, and that amount decreases as the relationship becomes more and more intimate.
  - d. Relationships experience periods of marked increases and decreases in the amount and intimacy of self-disclosure, reflecting some change in the relationship.
  - e. Interpersonal relationships cannot achieve intimacy without self-disclosure.
4. Characteristics of Self-Disclosure
  - a. Self-disclosing is moderated by rules and boundaries. **Communication privacy management theory** suggests that each of us has our own boundaries and rules for sharing personal information.
  - b. Self-disclosure usually occurs in small increments.

### **In-Text Opportunity for Classroom Discussion**

#### **Relating to Diverse Others: Cultural Differences in Self-Disclosure**

People's cultural backgrounds influence the kinds of information and they reveal to others and the level of intimacy with that information. This feature presents research on cultural differences regarding self-disclosure. Hold a class discussion where students talk about how to be other-oriented when engaging in self-disclosures with people from different cultural backgrounds.

- c. Self-disclosure moves from less personal to more personal information.
  - i. Level 5: Cliché communication
  - ii. Level 4: Facts and biographical information
  - iii. Level 3: Attitudes and personal ideas
  - iv. Level 2: Personal feelings
  - v. Level 1: Peak or gut level communication
- d. Self-disclosure is reciprocal.
  - i. The **dyadic effect** is a term used to describe the reciprocal nature of self-disclosure: "You disclose to me, and I'll disclose to you."
  - ii. We sometimes employ the dyadic effect as a strategy to gain information about others.
  - iii. In closer relationships, we might not reciprocate during a given interaction, but we expect reciprocation over the course of the relationship.



- e. Self-disclosure involves risk and requires trust.
  - i. We would be more likely to share a family secret if: (a) we found out that our communication partner had a similar problem and revealing the secret would help him or her; (b) we thought the secret would eventually come to light anyway; (c) there was some urgency in revealing the secret such that continuing to hide the secret creates more problems than revealing it; (d) we thought the family member would not mind if the secret were told; (e) it seemed normal and natural given the topic of conversation.
  - ii. Looking for clues to validate or invalidate an online claim is called **warranting**.
- f. Self-disclosure reflects perceptions about the nature of your relationships.
  - i. What you reveal about yourself to others and what others reveal to you about themselves provides important information about how each of you perceives the quality, intimacy, and nature of your relationships.
  - ii. Interpreting the level of intimacy based on what a person discloses is challenging.
  - iii. What is risky and intimate to one person might not be perceived that way to another.

### **In-Text Opportunity for Classroom Discussion**

#### **Improving Your Communication Skills: Self-Disclosure as a Dance**

This feature asks students to think about self-disclosure as a dance and provides strategies for students to improve their own self-disclosure, while also encouraging their relational partners to self-disclose. Pair each student with a student that he or she hardly knows. Have pairs practice the different strategies in this feature as students get to know one another and practice self-disclosing information about themselves.

### **In-Text Opportunity for Classroom Discussion**

#### **Applying an Other-Orientation to Understanding Interpersonal Relationships**

This feature asks students to examine current interpersonal relationships that they have with other people and consider relationships at different stages of the relational development process. Have students independently complete the questions within this feature as they consider their different relationships. Then pair students to discuss their reflections and compare similarities and differences in relational development.

## **KEY TERMS**

relationship, LO 9.1	proximity, LO 9.2	social exchange theory, LO 9.4
interpersonal relationship, LO 9.1	physical appearance, LO 9.2	immediate rewards and costs, LO 9.4
interpersonal intimacy, LO 9.1	competence, LO 9.2	forecasted rewards and costs, LO 9.4
relationship of circumstance, LO 9.1	reciprocation of liking, LO 9.2	cumulative rewards and costs, LO 9.4
relationship of choice, LO 9.1	similarity, LO 9.2	expected rewards and costs, LO 9.4
complementary relationship, LO 9.1	complementary needs, LO 9.2	relational dialectics theory, LO 9.4
symmetrical relationship, LO 9.1	relational development, LO 9.3	social penetration theory, LO 9.4
competitive symmetrical relationship, LO 9.1	relational escalation, LO 9.3	social penetration model, LO 9.4
submissive symmetrical relationship, LO 9.1	introductions, LO 9.3	breadth, LO 9.4
parallel relationship, LO 9.1	casual banter, LO 9.3	depth, LO 9.4
interpersonal attraction, LO 9.2	relational de-escalation, LO 9.3	communication privacy management theory, LO 9.4
short-term initial attraction, LO 9.2	post-intimacy relationship, LO 9.3	dyadic effect, LO 9.4
long-term maintenance attraction, LO 9.2	turning point, LO 9.3	warranting, LO 9.4
	causal turning point, LO 9.3	
	reflective turning point, LO 9.3	
	filtering, LO 9.4	

## **LECTURE TOPICS**

1. Which of the theories of interpersonal relationship development best explains the way that you escalate and de-escalate relationships with others? Why?
2. How has the advent of social media changed the ways that individuals escalate and de-escalate relationships?
3. How has the advent of social media changed the attraction process?

## **GROUP IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES FOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT**

1. **Discussion on Charisma.** According to the textbook, charismatic people attract us with their charm and demeanor. We find people credible if they display a blend of enthusiasm, trustworthiness, competence, and power. In groups of three to five, students should begin by making a list of people they believe are charismatic. Then, they should determine WHAT makes each of those people charismatic. Finally, they should determine if they would find those people appropriate for an interpersonal relationship based on that charisma and explain why or why not. A large-class discussion on charisma as an attraction in interpersonal relationships may follow.

2. **Participant Observations.** If this class falls on a nice day, invite students to join you on the campus plaza or some other place where students gather. Instruct them to inconspicuously observe other student dyads walking around campus. As students take notes, ask them to consider what they can discern about the stage and character of the relationships they observe from students' posture, distance from each other, touching behaviors, facial expressions, open and closed body positions, and so on. Also, ask students to draw on material from the chapter on nonverbal communication, as well as on the stages of relational escalation material from this chapter. In the following class, have them report on their findings.
3. **Video Application—*Jerry Maguire*.** The movie *Jerry Maguire* (starring Tom Cruise, Renee Zellweger, and Cuba Gooding Jr.) clearly presents the stages of relational escalation and relational de-escalation. You could show the movie in its entirety, with a discussion following, or, you could select from a number of scenes that illustrate various dimensions of interpersonal relationships. One particularly compelling scene occurs right after Jerry Maguire (Cruise) begins trying to de-escalate his relationship with Dorothy (Zellweger). Their relationship had progressed very quickly toward intimacy, and Jerry has become nervous and somewhat disillusioned with the commitment the relationship requires. In a very powerful illustration of relational de-escalation, Jerry places Dorothy's son (to whom he has become quite attached) between them on their bed. Both verbal and nonverbal cues make clear what is going on in the relationship. In another scene, Cuba Gooding Jr., playing the role of a star athlete, helps Jerry understand what he must do if he is to save the relationship ("If you love her . . . you got to tell her."). This is an excellent movie for illustrating a host of concepts related to interpersonal communication, especially in the area of romantic interpersonal relationships.

## **HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS**

1. **Power in Marital Relationships: "Analyzing My Parents' Marriage."** Ask students to write about the marriage or relationship of the people who raised them. Was/is the relationship complementary, symmetrical (competitive symmetrical or submissive symmetrical), parallel, or some combination of these? How does the way they see their parents' marriage compare with and relate to how they see the ideal balance of power in their own current or future marriage relationship? In the dating relationships they have had, how was power negotiated, and what form(s) did the relationships take? Students from single-parent homes might write about the advantages and disadvantages of having all (or most) of the parental power concentrated in one person.
2. **Predicting the Future.** The theory of predicted outcome value (POV) suggests that we assess the potential for any given relationship to meet our need for self-image confirmation and weigh that assessment against the potential costs. Have students recall how each met his or her best friend and, if applicable, his or her significant other. Then, have students write two to three paragraphs on how POV was applied in those early interactions. As they begin to write about those meetings, ask students to also write on "What if POV was wrong or had let you down that time? What if you had NOT chosen your current best friend or significant other?"

3. **Applying Social Exchange Theory to Close Relationships.** Ask students to think of a relationship from the past or present. Using the social exchange theory, ask them to analyze the relationship based on the rewards and costs.

Immediate rewards	Immediate costs
Forecasted rewards	Forecasted costs
Cumulative rewards	Cumulative costs
Expected rewards	Expected costs
Based on your analysis, what is the predicted outcome?	

## **REVEL WRITING EXERCISES**

### **Journal Writing**

**9.1 Journal: Changing a Relationship.** What can a person do to preserve a friendship after failing in his or her attempt to escalate the relationship to romance? What strategies might a person use in rejecting another person's attempt to escalate a relationship? How might those strategies be affected by the kind of relationship they had before?

**9.2 Journal: Short-Term Attraction.** Under what circumstances is it appropriate to act on your initial short-term attraction toward another person? Under what circumstances is it inappropriate?

**9.3 Journal: Relational Stages.** If two people have agreed to maintain a relationship below the highest level in the model of relational stages (the intimacy stage), how ethical is it for one of the people to nonetheless continually try to move the relationship to the intimacy stage?

**9.4 Journal: Ending a Relationship.** How ethical is it to intentionally increase the cost and reduce the rewards for a relational partner as a strategy for ending the relationship?

**Shared Writing: Sharing Power**

Working in groups, discuss the ways partners share power or decision-making responsibilities when deciding what to make for dinner—or whether they should eat out. Consider how the decision-making process would progress for the following types of relationships: complementary, competitive symmetrical, submissive symmetrical, and parallel. What factors would impact whether the couple would have a conflict over this decision or not?