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CMST 110

April 30, 2020

The idea of developing deep interpersonal relationships with other people is fascinating. Meeting family, friends, or anyone you may come across in life and choosing to become closer to them is a simple concept, but every relationship is different. In my eyes, family is a relationship we're born into and so we try to come to like everyone that surrounds us on a regular basis. Then there are friends whom we choose to like and surround ourselves with. But the most interesting kind of relationship to me is that of a significant other, someone we choose to be around all the time, and someone who may become our family someday. It's the closest to choosing your family that you can get and that's why some of these relationships can be almost magical. That is why I have chosen to write about my girlfriend, Kiersten.

It's funny looking back on when I first met Kiersten. We were both in marching band in high school and were placed right next to each other for the pre-football game set in my junior year. However, that entire time, I barely spoke a word to her. It wasn't until almost a whole year had passed and it was the next marching band season that I began to text her. At first just asking for some notes she had made for a meeting I couldn't attend, as she was one of our 3 drum majors. When we texted, although it was brief, I felt a feeling I hadn't felt before, maybe because we hadn't really talked before, but I knew that I wanted to get to know this girl a little better. This is what began the **initiating stage**.

The factors which affect the initiating stage and relationship development in general are clear to me as I remember how things went. Due to marching band, we were in the same place a lot throughout the summer and into the school year, so **proximity** had a big role in us getting to know each other. We knew that we were also both big band nerds and so **similarity** also played a role before we knew much else about each other. **Attractiveness** was a big thing for me. I found her very physically attractive, but she also had an attractive and friendly personality. Once I realized that she found me attractive as well I knew for certain that I wanted to get closer to her because the idea of us both being attracted to each other was exciting. I believe that we both had this feeling and so we went to the next stage of the relationship.

The **experimentation stage** came fairly quickly. I had asked her to roller skate at a band party to try to get to know her better. The only problem was we were both awkward and terrible at skating. I drove her and her brother home after practice once as well and got to know more about her and her family, and her about mine. After we officially decided to date, we realized that we had similar attitudes, beliefs, and while we didn't share a lot of interests, whenever one of us tried the other's interests, like me watching a scary movie with her, we had a lot of fun.

The **intensifying stage** came about a month into dating when we told each other "I love you" in the most romantic place, a Meijer parking lot. We went to the homecoming dance together and showed each other more affection in public. It was after this I knew that this relationship would not be just a short-lived one and so we both opened up more. I have definitely done more **self-disclosure** with Kiersten than I have anyone else. I told her about medical issues and embarrassing stories. As the name of the stage implies, our relationship really intensified from that point on. We became much more open around each other and started to not care as much what the other one thought about certain things because we knew that the other wouldn't

care as much as we thought and that we'd stay together anyway. It didn't matter if we ate messily or said something weird, we were inseparable, and began the **integration stage**.

We were very public with the relationship at this point. We met each other's families, held hands at every opportunity at school, and I would talk about her to my friends and she would talk to her friends about me. We shared some friends already, but I think that our separate friends talked to the other person more after a while as well because they liked us together and wanted to encourage it.

I believe that Kiersten and I are currently in the **bonding stage** and have been for a while. This stage is characterized by commitment, and while we haven't gotten married as we're still pretty young, we do talk about the future quite a bit and plan to stay together for a very long time. It's no secret that we're together and I believe everyone else around us wants us to stay together as well.

Like any relationship, although we are both very happy, it's still not perfect all of the time. There has been some **relational maintenance** done as we've gone through these stages. One thing that has been a struggle recently is our distance. Since I have gone to college, we don't see each other nearly as much as when we were both in high school and it has put some strain on us. And especially now with everyone being quarantined, we haven't seen each other for over a month. But we have made do by texting and video calling occasionally. Modern technology has made the distance more bearable.

Another struggle is that of the **dialectic theory** and more specifically the contradictory ideas of **predictability and novelty**. We've been together for long enough that we are very predictable to each other. Only somewhat recently did we realize that we should try to vary

things as what we were doing before was almost too predictable. We would go to the same few places on dates and talk about the same things throughout the day. But I think now that we have realized this and discussed it, things are going better, and our dates will get better once we can go out again.

Overall, I think my relationship with Kiersten is very stable. After reading about interpersonal relationships, it didn't open my eyes to a lot of new things because even though we are young, Kiersten and I have talked about a lot of this sort of stuff before. It's no surprise to us that there are problems within the relationship, and I think that we are both aware more problems can and will arise in the future. But I think this makes us better prepared and I am very confident that we could overcome anything that is thrown at us at this point.