

Dynamics of Interpersonal Relationships, Day 1

2019-11-01

Course(s) Used:

- Interpersonal Communication

Goals and Objectives:

- Students are familiar with Knapp's Staircase Model
- Students are familiar with criticisms of Knapp's Model

Rationale: There are several models of relationship development and ending. Students should be familiar with one of these models to be successful in the class. Knapp's Staircase Model, although not perfect, is a good entry-point for this discussion and has been very influential.

Materials Needed

Materials:

- Crayons
- Example Greeting Cards

Technology:

- None

Outline of the Lesson

1. Review of previous session's content
2. Summarize Knapp's Staircase Model of relationship development and dissolution¹
 1. Initiating
 2. Experimenting
 3. Intensifying
 4. Integrating
 5. Bonding
 6. Differentiating
 7. Circumscribing
 8. Stagnating
 9. Avoiding
 10. Terminating

¹ Knapp, M. L., Vangelisti, A. L., & Caughlin, J. P. (2014). *Interpersonal communication in human relationships* (7th ed.). Boston: Pearson Education.

3. Identify primary phases

1. Formation
2. Maintenance²
3. Dissolution

² The maintenance phase is often cyclical, running through integrating, bonding, differentiating, and circumscribing back to integrating again.

4. Hands on group work: "Creating greeting cards to understand and to evaluate Knapp's Staircase Model of relationships"³

1. "In the next 30 minutes, your team will create a greeting card for a target audience of 18- to 25-year-old college students. The card should convey a message that reflects the core of your assigned relational stage. In creating the card, your team should answer the following questions:"

1. What message do you wish to convey in the card?
2. How do you wish to say it: verse (a line of metrical writing, a stanza, or a piece written in meter), prose (generally non-rhyming and should sound as if the sender is talking), or punchline (a humorous message, often with the joke set up on the outside of the card and the punchline delivered on the inside)?
3. What visuals or illustrations will you use and to what end (gain attention and interest, convey a specific message and/or emotion, etc.)?

2. "In addition, consider the following advice:"

1. Strive to be clear, concise, creative, and appropriate.
2. Try to convey your ideas in few words. As they say in the greeting card industry, "write tight."
3. Use visuals in tandem with your words to convey your ideas.
4. If you wish to use humor or rhyme, think about the appropriateness for your target audience and relational stage.
5. Avoid clichés and overused expressions, such as "You're my dream come true" or "You're always there for me."

3. Divide class into 10 groups.

4. Present cards from each group (try to guess what it is for).

5. Debrief the activity

1. Which greeting card(s) did you correctly match with a stage?
2. Which card(s) did you incorrectly match with a stage?
3. Why do you think you answered some correctly and some incorrectly?
4. Does your personal experience in relationships adhere to Knapp's model? Why or why not?
5. How well does Knapp's model depict sexual relationships such as hooking up or friends-with-benefits? Would a greeting card for either of the above relationships sell well? Why or why not?

³ Kauffman, J., & Kornberg, J. (2018). Creating greeting cards to understand and to evaluate Knapp's Staircase Model of relationships. *Communication Teacher*, 32(4), 198-202. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17404622.2017.1372601>

6. Greeting card manufactures, such as Hallmark, try to achieve “universal specificity,” or the creation of messages that address emotions or situations in relationships that seem universal, thereby appealing to the widest possible market of consumers. Consequently, in what ways and to what degree are people’s emotions and relationship situations universal? In what ways and to what extent are a person’s or a couple’s emotions and relationship situations unique?
 7. How accurate do you think Knapp’s model is in describing relationship development and dissolution today?
6. Lesson closing

Limitations

The large number of steps mean that changes may be necessary in classes with lower enrollment.

Variations and Accommodations

Follow guidance from local accommodation authorities.