Interpersonal Communication

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This lecture focuses specifically on interpersonal communication or the communication that tends to be one-on-one in nature. So, this might be communication between you and your best friend, or communication between you and your parent, or between you and a co-worker. If you remember back to the Hierarchy of Communication (the pyramid shaped model), interpersonal communication was one step above the foundation of communication, intrapersonal communication.

Social and Intimate Relationships

A social relationship is a relationship with others who you are not personally intimate with. You may have a social relationship with your co-workers, neighbors, bar buddies, school friends, etc. A social relationship is a relationship based on a situation like school, work, or living proximity. Intimate relationships are much closer relationships than social relationships because they involve passionate feelings, a lasting commitment to the relationships and investments of time, energy, thoughts, and feelings to the relationships. No matter if it’s a social relationship or an intimate relationship, every relationship operates under communication rules.

There are two types of rules that relationships operate under: Constitutive rules define the meaning of various types of communication in personal relationships. Regulative rules influence when and with whom to engage in various kinds of communication.

Six Stages of Friendship

1. Role limited interaction: These are the first encounters we have with new friends. In this stage we tend to follow standard social roles and rules including being careful about what we disclose to the new friend.

2. Friendly relations: This is the second stage of a friendship where you discover what common grounds and interests exist between you and the new friend.

3. Moving toward friendship: This is the third stage of a friendship where you start to make arrangements to spend time together.

4. Nascent friendship: You and the friend think of yourselves as friends and have your own relationship rules and interaction patterns.

5. Stabilized friendship: This is the fifth stage of a friendship where there is the assumption of stability and trust in the relationship based on a history of shared intimate information. The relationship may continue in this stage forever.

6. Waning friendship: This is the last stage of a friendship and it happens when one or both of the friends decide not to be committed to the relationship.

As you look back on the friendship stages, can you list people in your life that fit into each category?
Evolution of Romance
The stages of friendship are not the same as the stages that a couple goes through in a romance.

The three major stages of romance are:

1. **Escalation**: This is the early stage of the romantic relationship where we invite another into a romantic relationship, we explore commonalities, and the communication becomes intense, much closer, and includes discussions about strengths/weaknesses of the relationship. There may be conflict or commitment in this stage of the romance.

2. **Navigation**: This is where the relational culture of a romance develops. There are private rules, codes, and patterns that are developed between the couple.

3. **Deterioration**: This is a series of processes where the relationship commitment and communication decline resulting in the end of the relationship.
   - **Intrapsychic processes**: One or both partners begin to recognize they are dissatisfied with the relationship.
   - **Dyadic processes**: There is a breakdown in the normal communication, social patterns and rules of the relationship.
   - **Social support processes**: The individuals turn to others for emotional support and understanding as the breakup process continues.
   - **Grave dressing processes**: This is the mourning and explanation step where each individual publicly shares the end of the relationship with relatives, friends, co-workers, etc.
   - **Resurrection processes**: This is the final step in the decline of romance when each individual moves on with their life without the other person.

Self-Disclosure
Self-disclosure is the foundation of interpersonal communication. This is when we reveal personal information about ourselves that are others are unlikely to discover on their own. When we share private thoughts with others they gain knowledge of who we are, what our preferences are, and even our dreams.

It’s not rocket science to understand that we tend to disclose more to people we are close too and less to people we are acquaintances with! We also tend to disclose more in the early stages of a relationship than we do in later stages of a relationship which also makes sense since the earliest stage of a relationship is the discovery stage where I learn about who you are. If we develop a relationship that is long lasting, we don’t need to share as much because we already know a lot about the other person and we trust the person more making it less necessary to self-disclose. Likewise, if our relationship disintegrates, we will also self-disclose less but this is primarily because we might not trust the person with information or our feelings anymore.
Johari Window

The Johari Window is a model that depicts the four aspects of ourselves – the publicly known or open self, the hidden self that we don’t tell anyone about, the things about ourselves that others know but we don’t or the blind self, and the great unknown self which is the self of the future, our potential. **Look at the model as we proceed through this next section.**

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<tr>
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<th>Known to Self</th>
<th>Not Known to Self</th>
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<tr>
<td>Known to Others</td>
<td>OPEN</td>
<td>BLIND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Known to Others</td>
<td>HIDDEN</td>
<td>UNKNOWN</td>
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When you look at the model, there are four quadrants which make up areas of the self.

The **open** area includes aspects of the self that are known to you and known to other people. I call this the “name, rank, serial number” area because this is where your public information would go. In my open area, this would include my name, position/title, phone number, address, and even email address.

The **hidden** area includes aspects of the self that are known to you but you keep them hidden from other people. I call this the “private” or “secret” area because these are things I don’t generally share with other people. In my hidden area, this includes my weight, dumb things that I’ve done in the past that I definitely don’t bring up to people, and my secret fascinations with some subjects.

The **blind** area includes aspects of the self that others know about you but you tend to be blind to them. I call this the “others see it but I don’t” area. In my blind area, this includes that I may appear to be strong willed, opinionated, and highly intelligent to other people. The reality might be that I often feel unsure about myself and inadequate in some situations so I might not see myself in the same manner that others see me. I have a good friend who got agitated in a graduate class we were taking together. I could tell she was agitated because her foot was hopping up and down and she was clenching her teeth. I leaned over and said “quit clenching your teeth, you’re jaw is going to cramp up!” She looked at me shocked and said she hadn’t realized she was clenching her teeth. When I told her that she did that all the time, she was even more shocked!

The **unknown** area includes aspects of the self that are unknown to you and to other people. I call this the “future” category. My unknown area includes talents that I may have but I may not have experimented with them to develop them. For instance, I spend a lot of time in the theater working with furniture for the stage. In that capacity, I’ve gained knowledge of furniture time periods, fabrics, and refinishing. I’ve always thought that I might like to recover some of my personal furniture pieces but since I’ve never done this, I really don’t know if I will be any good at it. The unknown would be that I
might be great at this and someday, it might be my career or hobby. Or, I might be terrible at it! It’s completely unknown...

**Confirmation and Disconfirmation**

A lot of interpersonal communication depends upon the concepts of confirmation and disconfirmation. **Confirmation** is communication that shows us we are valued, important, and respected. These are the positive strokes we receive from others and we give to those we value. **Disconfirmation** is communication that shows us we are not important, not valued, and not respected. This is when others avoid looking or talking with us and may indicate they don’t have time for our thoughts and opinions. Looking at those two concepts, it’s pretty obvious which communication type we’d prefer to receive!

Check out this chart to see the various levels of confirmation and disconfirmation.

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<th><strong>Disconfirmation</strong></th>
<th><strong>Confirmation</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Evaluation</strong>: We become naturally defensive when we feel that others are evaluating us – nobody likes a finger wagged or pointed at them.</td>
<td><strong>Description</strong>: This is when you describe behavior from your own perspective rather than wagging a finger at another person. Using “I”-language in our communication allows us to own our opinion rather than pointing at the other. It is much harder to argue with an “I” statement! And, you show the person you’re perspective rather than pointing at them.</td>
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<td><strong>Certainty</strong>: We become defensive when others speak to us in absolutes as if their mind is already made up and we have no opportunity to participate in a decision that impacts us.</td>
<td><strong>Provisionalism</strong>: This is when you allow others to express themselves and their opinions which shows that you value their input to a decision – especially useful tactic to employ if you are trying to gain support for a new idea or practice!</td>
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<td><strong>Strategy</strong>: We become defensive when we feel we are being manipulated or tricked – when someone is operating with a clear strategy as they communicate with us.</td>
<td><strong>Spontaneity</strong>: Even if you do have a goal to achieve, it will be better to communicate in a spontaneous manner that is friendly or straightforward.</td>
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<td><strong>Control</strong>: We become defensive when we perceive that others are trying to control or micromanage our behavior and interactions.</td>
<td><strong>Problem orientation</strong>: A much more positive approach to working with others is taking the approach of collaboration to solve problems. When people are involved in the decision, they are much more likely to feel valued.</td>
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<td><strong>Neutrality</strong>: We become defensive when others act in a neutral or detached manner when we tell them something important about ourselves.</td>
<td><strong>Empathy</strong>: Showing others that you care about their thoughts and opinions lets them know that you value them.</td>
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<td><strong>Superiority</strong>: We become defensive when others act as if they know more than we do in a superior manner.</td>
<td><strong>Equality</strong>: Treating others as equals even if you have more knowledge on a subject puts everyone on an even playing ground.</td>
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Relational Dialectics
Relational dialectics are the opposing and continual tensions that are normal in personal relationships. Each relationship has a certain level of normal tension. The three relational dialectics that are most common are:

**Autonomy/Connection**: We are continually at tension between wanting to be autonomous or a solo operator and being connected to others through relationships.

**Novelty/Predictability**: We are continually at tension between wanting routine or predictability in a relationship and wanting something new, different, or novel.

**Openness/Closedness**: We are continually at tension between wanting an open relationship with lots of personal sharing and wanting our privacy.

Conflict in Relationships
Conflict is inevitable in all relationships – friendships, lovers, parent/children, co-workers. There are very few relationships that are exempt from conflict. Conflict is when two people have different viewpoints, philosophies, goals, interests, or belief systems. The two people perceive that the differences are incompatible. **Overt conflict** exists when people express differences in a straightforward manner. Some conflict is healthy and overt conflict is a healthy way of dealing with conflict. **Covert conflict** is when people hide their differences pretending either they don’t exist by denying anything is wrong or expressing it indirectly. Covert conflict is unhealthy to any relationship is very destructive. Check out the four components of conflict in your textbook!

Think about a close relationship you are involved in. What is your orientation toward conflict? What are your typical responses to conflict? By analyzing your typical responses to conflict, you can work to improve your responses when conflict occurs. Do you exit when it comes to conflict or do you neglect conflict? Or, are you loyal to the relationship and you use your voice to actively participate in resolving the conflict?