RESEARCH FILE FOR
SP200 Interpersonal Communication

TOPIC #3: Intimate Relationships
Types of Marriage

Topic 5: Intimate Relationships - Cuber and Harroff’s Five Types of Marriage Theory breaks down marriage types into five distinctive categories based on field research conducted. There are also some distinctive categories identified by Mary Anne Fitzpatrick. (1) How did the researchers come up with the categories (2) Explain each of the types identified (3) Consider if this theory can they be applied to ALL the types of marriages in today’s modern world.
http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3406900286.html

KEY SEARCH TERMS:
(Five) Types of Marriage
Traditional Marriage, Independent Marriage, Separate Marriage
Vital Marriage, Total Marriage, Passive-Congenial Marriage, Devitalized Marriage,
Conflict-habituated Marriage
Mary Anne Fitzpatrick
John F. Cuber and Peggy B. Harroff

WORKS CITED

Inter-Act Tenth Edition
Interpersonal Communication
Concepts, Skills, and Contexts
Kathleen S. Verderber
Northern Kentucky University
Rudolph F. Verderber
University of Cincinnati
New York Oxford
Oxford University Press
2004
Oxford University Press

Oxford New York
Auckland Bangkok Buenos Aires Cape Town Chennai
Dar es Salaam Delhi Hong Kong Istanbul Karachi Kolkata
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Mumbai
Nairobi Sao Paulo Shanghai Taipei Tokyo Toronto

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Published by Oxford University Press, Inc.
198 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016
http://www.oup-usa.org

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Verderber, Kathleen S., 1948-2003
Inter-act : interpersonal communication : concepts, skills, and contexts / Kathleen S.
Verderber, Rudolph F. Verderber.—10th ed.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Interpersonal communication. 2. Interpersonal relations. I. Verderber, Rudolph F. II.
Title.
BF637.C45V47 2004
158.2—dc21 2003042967

Printing number: 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper
intimacy—or as a substitute for it. Romance and sex may be a kind of adventure pursued not as an expression of a deep level of commitment and for the mutual benefit of both parties, but rather for the selfish pleasure of the individual. As a result, you will want to proceed cautiously before moving a satisfying relationship to a sexual level. Men and women can have long-lasting, satisfying intimate platonic relationships. And much as we may not like to believe it, the continued satisfaction of the partners in such a relationship may depend on them not sexualizing it.

Marriage Relationships

A substantial amount of research has been directed at understanding intimacy in marriage. As we have said earlier, perhaps the ultimate in intimate relationships is a good marriage. When the relationship between life partners is a good one, it meets many tests of the ideal. Perhaps most important, a good marriage is one in which people find greatest satisfaction in being with each other. J. D. Bloch (1980), a psychologist who surveyed more than two thousand Americans, says 40 percent of all married people consider their spouse to be their best friend. In a different sample, 88 percent of married men and 78 percent of married women named their spouse as the person “closest” to them (Fischer & Narus, 1981, p. 449).

Nevertheless, what husbands and wives get from each other is somewhat out of balance. Despite the fact that married women named their spouse as their closest friend, women still need close female friendships to satisfy all their needs. Men, on the other hand, reported that their wives offered them the most satisfaction and emotional support of all the relationships in their lives—more than neighbor, co-worker, boss, parent, sibling, or same-sex and opposite-sex friends (Argyle & Furnham, 1983, p. 490).

Despite similarities of apparent needs in marriage partners, there is no single ideal marriage style. Mary Anne Fitzpatrick, a leading scholar of marriage, has identified characteristics or dimensions that identify different types of couples (Fitzpatrick, 1988, p. 76; Fitzpatrick & Badzinski, 1994, p. 741). Couples can be differentiated on the basis of their “independence,” the extent to which they share their feelings with one another. Some couples are highly interdependent, depending on their partners for comfort, expressions of love, and fun. Other couples are more reserved and do not depend on their partners for emotional sharing and support. The second dimension on which couples can be differentiated is their ideology. Ideology is the extent to which the partners adhere to traditional belief systems and values, especially about marriage and sex roles, or hold nontraditional beliefs and values that tolerate change and uncertainty in relationships. The third dimension is one that Fitzpatrick originally called “conflict avoidance” but now calls “communication.” Couples types differ in the extent to which they seek to avoid conflict as they interact.
Using these dimensions, Fitzpatrick describes three basic types of enduring couple relationships, which she labels as traditional, independent, and separate.

**Traditional couples** have a traditional ideology, but maintain some independence in their marriages. They have a traditional ideology, but maintain some independence in their marriages. They follow the values accepted by parents and grandparents. Their values place more emphasis on stability than on spontaneity. They hold to traditional customs: The woman takes her husband’s last name in marriage; infidelity is always inexcusable. Traditional relationships show a great deal of interdependence, marked by a high degree of sharing and companionship, and they are apt to engage in rather than avoid conflict.

**Independent couples** share an ideology that embraces change and uncertainty in the marriage relationship, but like traditional couples, they are interdependent and apt to engage in rather than avoid conflict to resolve differences. They hold more nonconventional values. Independents believe that relationships should not constrain the partners’ freedoms. Independent partners maintain separate physical spaces and sometimes find it difficult to maintain regular daily time schedules.

**Separate couples** are characterized by a shared traditional ideology, but differ from the previous two groups in that they engage in less emotional sharing and are less interdependent. In addition, separate couples tend to avoid conflict. They are conventional in marital and family issues, but like independents, they stress the importance of individual freedom. They have significantly less companionship and sharing in their marriage than partners in either traditional or independent marriages. Separate couples indicate interdependence by keeping a regular daily schedule.
The notion that not all marriages are exactly alike seems obvious. We all know of couples who seem to have marriages that "work" for them and these marriages seem similar in "feel" to other couples we know. At the same time, we know some couples whose relationships are very different from the marriages of other people we know, but which seem equally effective for the people involved. As a doctoral student, Mary Anne Fitzpatrick became intrigued with the different relational patterns that she saw in marriages. In her dissertation she began work to uncover a typology or classification scheme that could describe these different relationships. Fitzpatrick’s own observations of married couples suggested to her that couples of the same type shared a similar pattern in how they related to one another that was different than the pattern displayed by couples of a different type.

As is noted in the text, Fitzpatrick has found three distinct types of couples: traditional (both partners have a traditional ideology and are highly interdependent and apt to engage in rather than avoid conflict), independent (partners share an ideology that embraces change and uncertainty in the marriage relationship, but like the traditional, are interdependent and apt to engage in rather than avoid conflict to resolve differences), and separate (couples are characterized by a shared traditional ideology, but differ from the previous two groups in that they engage in less emotional sharing and so are less interdependent and tend to avoid conflict).

In conducting her research, Fitzpatrick has demonstrated scholarly leadership through her methods. In all of her work, Fitzpatrick has been careful to study a broad range of couples from a wide cross-section of the population. While in some research it may be permissible to study only college students (who are easy to find at a university), Fitzpatrick believes that for theories about communication in marriage and family to be accurate, the people studied must be drawn from the broader base. So she is careful to recruit participants for her studies in a variety of settings and from a variety of backgrounds.

Fitzpatrick believes that her most useful work comes from studies in which she examines the actual conversations of couples and families. Using a research technique called "disourse analysis," Fitzpatrick and other scholars study, categorize, and summarize the flow of actual conversations. By studying the order, topics, and interaction processes through which conversations unfold, Fitzpatrick is able to understand how different types of couples negotiate their relationships. This technique is labor intensive, as each hour of conversation takes about thirty hours of study and coding to turn the conversation into data that can be compared to other conversations.

Finally, Fitzpatrick believes in involving her undergraduate students in her research. Along with her colleagues at the University of Wisconsin and elsewhere, Fitzpatrick is committed to the concept of "scholarship in the service of teaching," meaning that the purpose of scholarship is twofold. First, through scholarship, we create better explanations that more accurately describe the world. These
Recently, Fitzpatrick has extended her work on couple types to understanding how the family relationships differ in families headed by different types of couples. She has already completed one project that provided encouraging evidence for her belief that there is a systematic relationship between types of couples and types of families. Currently, Fitzpatrick and her students have begun to code the conversation data from families with adolescent children. Once coded the data will be used to discover how different types of families communicate with one another and handle misunderstandings. For a list of some of Fitzpatrick's major publications, see the references for this chapter at the end of the book.

Beginning in January 1997, Professor Fitzpatrick took an additional role at the university, becoming Associate Dean of Social Sciences in the College of Letters and Arts. In this capacity, she oversees the operation of thirty-nine departments and programs of the college. At the same time, Fitzpatrick continues to teach and pursue her research program.

While in two-thirds of all the couples she studied, Fitzpatrick found that couples agreed about their marital type, in the remaining third the partners disagreed. When partners disagreed, the wife most frequently classified herself as a "traditional" and the husband more frequently saw himself as a "separate." Fitzpatrick called this pattern "separate-traditionals." In these relationships, the husband and wife agree on the traditional ideology of marriage, but whereas the wife views the marriage as an interdependent relationship where conflict is expressed, the husband views the relationship as one that is more emotionally distant and where conflict should be avoided.

Using these couple types and focusing on actual conversations of couples, Fitzpatrick and her associates, as well as other scholars, have been able to understand how different couple types handle conflict, deal with compliance-gaining messages, display power and control, have casual discussions, and talk about the issues and themes that are important to a marriage.

What Fitzpatrick has concluded is that no couple type is better than the others; rather each type has different kinds of strengths and weaknesses. To provide more insight into Mary Anne Fitzpatrick and her work, we feature her in the above Spotlight on Scholars.

To many of us, an important question is, what is the secret to a long and happy marriage? Researchers have found there are three common characteristics of couples who have stayed together for more than fifty years (Dickson, 1995, pp.
The first characteristic is mutual respect—treating each other with dignity. In short, long-lasting marriages are a product of people’s valuing each other for what and who they are.

The second characteristic is a comfortable level of closeness—spending an appropriate amount of time with each other. This does not mean that longtime partners are with each other all the time. Whereas some long-range partners desire constant companionship, others are happy with relatively low closeness. But the defining point is that both partners continue to know each other. The fact is that many couples grow apart over time—that is, they quit seeking each other’s company or come to prefer the company of different people. What we’ve discovered is that continuing closeness takes effort on the part of the couple. For many couples, closeness is developed through such rituals as celebrations, family traditions, and patterned routines (Werner et al., 1993, p. 115). Probably the most important element in maintaining closeness in a relationship is a patterned routine. For instance, some couples make sure that at least one night a week they go out together for dinner and then take in a show or just sit and talk. When people regularly make time to be together, it’s easy for them to remember why they were drawn to one another. But if partners let their relationship drift, before long they may lose track of what brought them together in the first place. Yet with families, as with most people, practical matters often get in the way of nurturing the relationship. That is, some families are so busy confronting those things that “must be done” that they forget what it takes to keep a relationship growing. The ritual of patterned routines is designed to foster the relationship and is an essential part of any long-term relationship.

The third characteristic is the presence of a plan or life vision. Sometimes this is consciously negotiated. At other times it just seems to happen. But the defining point is that both partners agree on their long-term goals—and, of course, that both partners see each other in those long-term plans. Such partners talk about “we” and “us” rather than “I” or “me.”

**Family Relationships**

A family is “a group of intimates who generate a sense of home and group identity, complete with strong ties of loyalty and emotion, and experience a history and a future” (Galvin & Brommel, 1996). Families are structured in different ways. The traditional family consists of two opposite-sex parents living with one or more children from the union of those two parents. Single-parent families have one parent and one or more children. Blended families have two adults and one or more children, some of whom are from the union of those parents to other people. There are other family structures as well, including childless (or empty nest), extended (multiple generations of related people living together), and communal (unmarried people related by nongenetic factors).

Regardless of type, family relationships develop and change. A person’s first intimate friendships are likely to be with family members. For instance, small children first rely on their parents, then perhaps on a brother or sister. Family rela-