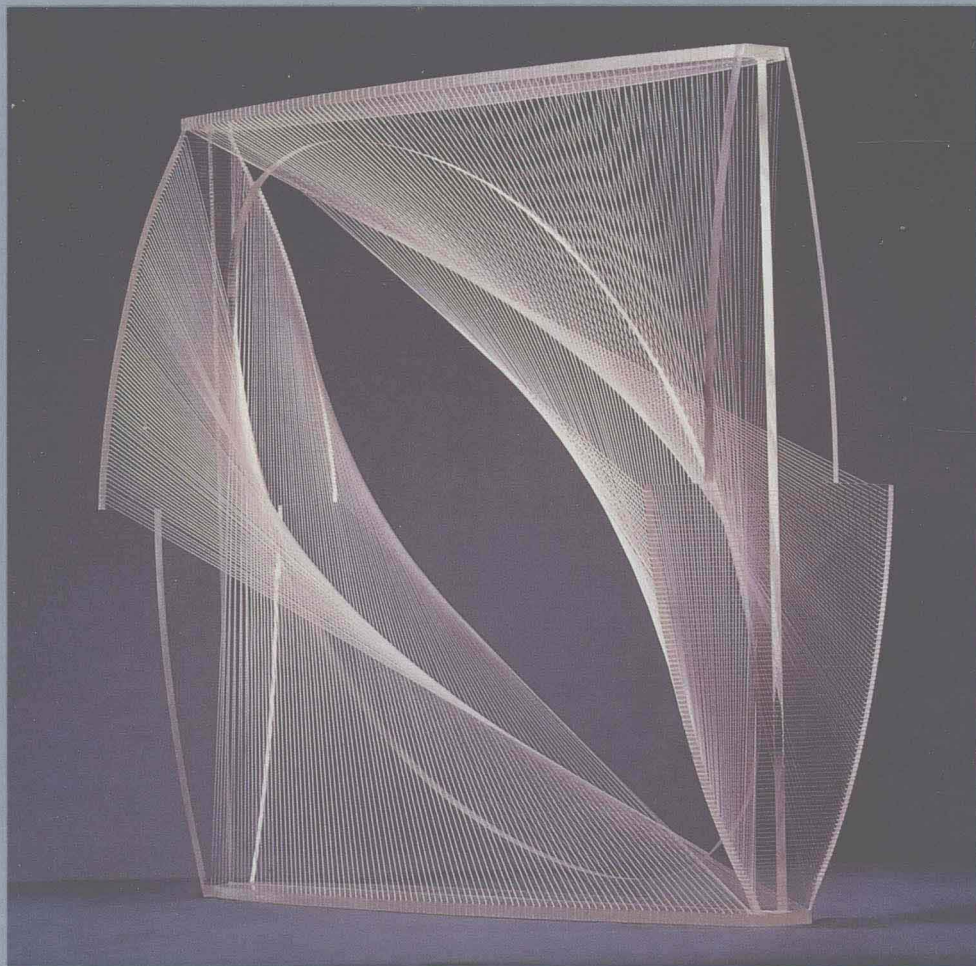


WILLIAM W. WILMOT



THIRD EDITION

Dyadic Communication

DYADIC COMMUNICATION

Third Edition

William W. Wilmot

University of Montana

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For Joyce, Carina, and Jason

DYADIC COMMUNICATION

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Preface

This book is appropriate for courses examining interpersonal relationships in detail. It presents a comprehensive relational view of interpersonal communication with a pragmatic, real-world perspective. The goal is to give the student an integrated view of communication concepts, both as intellectually exciting ideas and as practical insights for everyday life.

Since the first edition of this book appeared in 1975, the study of human communication has made dramatic advances. This third edition has retained the transactional orientation of the first edition but with significant improvements and updating, which parallel our understanding of one-to-one communication. In addition to incorporating the latest theory and research, the new edition includes new coverage, such as an extensive treatment of metacommunication and expanded coverage of relational competence and enhancement.

PLAN OF THE BOOK

The first chapter sets the foundation for studying dyadic pairs. It presents an expanded treatment of relationship functions and explores dyadic relationships within their contexts—groups of people in families and organizations. The chapter overviews the nature of dyadic communication and concludes with an historical view of the importance of two-person relationships.

The second and third chapters illustrate the centrality of communication in how we perceive ourselves and others. The more we study perceptions, the closer we must examine the centrality of communication. For example, the perceptual biases we use when perceiving others are based on the communication cues we interpret coming from them, and this notion is given expanded treatment in Chapter 3.

Some exciting new notions are introduced in Chapter 4, “Perception of the Relationship.” This chapter examines the mutual influences between communication behavior and relationship definitions. And, it illustrates how communication and relationship definitions are mutually influencing—the core elements in all relationships. In addition, it discusses how people distinguish between different kinds of relationships. This comprehensive treatment of the relational perspective expands on the important information in the earlier editions that many readers enjoyed.

Chapter 5, “Relational Intricacies,” was one of the favorite chapters for many readers of earlier editions. This chapter explores some

intriguing concepts about the maddening, complex, intriguing events that occur in two-person relationships. A new section entitled “Dyadic Dialectics” is a valuable addition to these topics and looks at the opposite needs we have in our relationships with others. For example, we need to be open and disclosive yet not share all information with the other. These dialectics are at the core of the decisions we all make in our communication exchanges with others.

Chapter 6, “Relationship Development and Dissolution,” has been updated with the latest research on these processes. An improved section on “Stabilized Definitions” charts the fluctuating dynamics of stable relationships, and a section on “relational oscillation” illustrates the recycling many people go through when attempting to dissolve an important relationship.

The final chapter has been retitled and expanded to treat both relational competence and enhancement. The importance of communication skills in both conversations and ongoing relationships is highlighted. Specifically, suggestions are made for the enhancement of relationships—how to improve them over time. The chapter ends with a retrospective view of the philosophy of communication presented throughout the entire book.

Readers interested in tracing references will find the extensive author and subject indexes helpful. The author index is keyed to the text where either the name is cited or the work is referenced by number in the discussion. And, as with the earlier editions, references are cited by number in the text to improve readability for the student, yet retain the information necessary to trace ideas.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I appreciate the careful reviewers who read and critiqued the cut and paste manuscript. Special thanks go to Leslie Baxter, Lewis and Clark College; Sheryl Perlmutter Bowen, University of Delaware; Thomas Frentz, University of Arkansas; Lawrence Nadler, Miami University; Malcolm Parks, University of Washington; Laura Stafford, Ohio State University; Sally Jane Widenmann, University of California at Santa Barbara; and Katherine Yost, Rutgers University. Their keen analysis coupled with a desire to improve the book are greatly appreciated. The jokes especially kept me going when I thought the tasks would never end. Any error or misstatement is probably the direct result of my not following someone's advice!

The students in Interpersonal Communication 234 at the University of Montana continue to be delightful, critical, and understanding. Teaching them remains a pleasure and source of renewal for me. When those students react to the concepts and examples in this book, it convinces me of the importance of teaching a comprehensive view of interpersonal communication.

I, too, have some important dyadic relationships. I am fortunate to be married to Dr. Joyce L. Hocker. She is both colleague and spouse, and continues to provide insight and understanding of communication in both personal and professional realms. She has taught me much about how to have a successful, challenging, and growing dyadic relationship and her influence on me cannot be overestimated. Jason and Carina, in addition to providing examples for the book, both invest effort at continuing our relationships, and I marvel at their growth and

change. Two better children can't be found—may we backpack forever!

Kathleen Domenig and Brian Henry served as my links with Roth Wilkofsky and McGraw-Hill, Inc. They are a first-rate group who kept encouraging me without bludgeoning me over the head about deadlines. Special thanks to Brian, for he dealt with all the details of getting the book into production, while being upbeat and of good cheer. Finally, all those unknown people behind the scenes at McGraw-Hill, Inc.—copy editors, artists, compositors, and others did a splendid job. I only wish the manuscript editors could read the essays my high school English teacher had to read!

Pam Mangus, niece and communication graduate, gave timely and high-level help with references and index. Thanks, Pam.

I appreciate those of you who have shared kind comments about the previous edition with me. They have been more influential than you would ever guess. Your interest in the accuracy of text and adaptation to student needs has helped motivate me to undertake this edition. Some of the more extensive responses have come from Thomas Frentz, University of Arkansas; Kathy Adams, California State University, Fresno; and Glen Hall, Montana State University.

Finally, one cannot write without some spiritual replenishment that comes from sources other than relationships. Special acknowledgment to Kitaro for his melodic compositions—Silver Cloud and Oasis (among others) helped me transcend the hours spent and float above the mundane. My other source of renewal comes from the clean air, lofty mountains, and wild animals of western Montana. May they always remain free and as close to their natural form as possible.

Finally, I am proud to be a member of the communication profession, composed of disparate individuals in a variety of institutions and private practice. In this academic discipline, theoretical notions are developed in conjunction with an active concern for the pragmatic effects on people's lives. One would be hard pressed to find a more balanced group of professionals.

Bill Wilmot
Missoula, Montana

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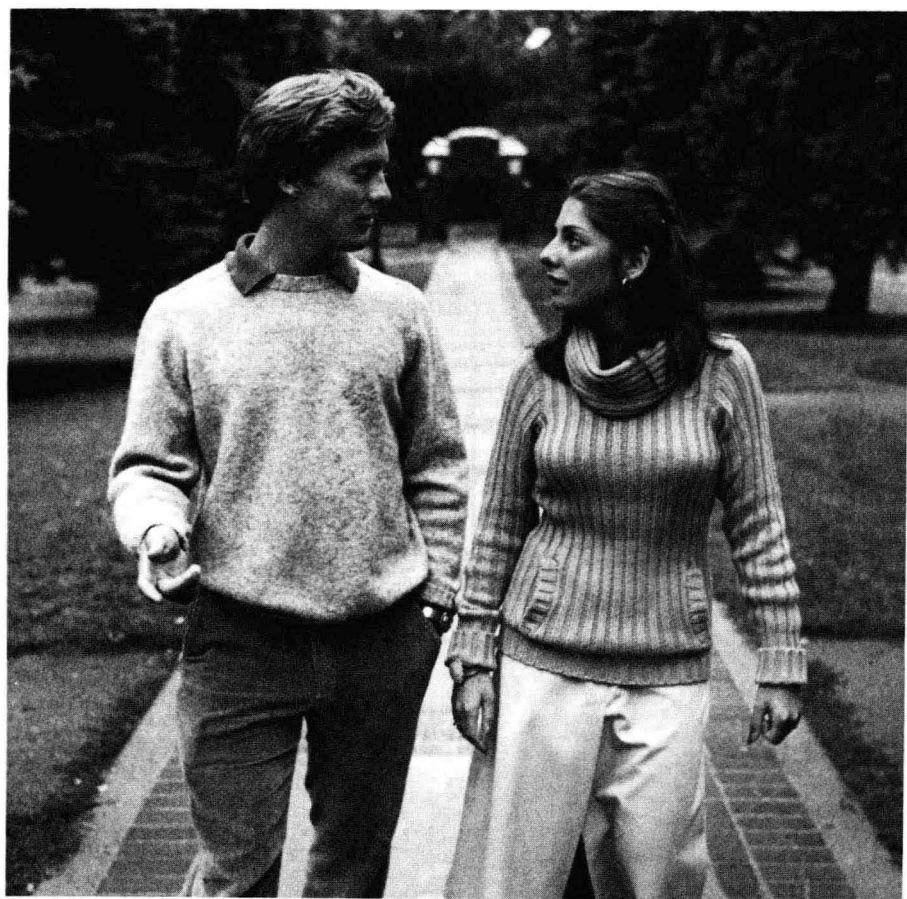
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Dyadic Communication

Chapter 1



The Nature of Dyadic Transactions

Dyadic Relationship Types and Functions

Dyadic Communication Defined

Dyadic Communication Is Transactional

Characteristics of Dyads

Each Dyad Is Unique

Dyads Allow for Intimacy

Dyads Are Complete Units

Dyads Are Fundamental

The Triad: A Dyad Plus One

Transactions in Triads

A Triad Dissected

Enter the Third Party

One for Two: Strengthening the Dyad

Two Against One: Fighting It Out

Dyadic Coalitions

Triangles and Tangles

Predicting the Coalitions

Coalitions in Larger Groups

The Ecology of Dyads

Using Coalitions Productively

Demands on the Dyad

Summary

... much of the social activity of individuals can be described as search behavior—a relentless process of social discovery in which one seeks out new friends to replace those who are either no longer present or who no longer share the same interests.

—ALVIN TOFFLER, *FUTURE SHOCK*

In our highly mobile society, our relationships with others are continually changing. Whether you leave home to attend college, change jobs, get married (or divorced), or join new groups, your friendship patterns change. As your close friends of yesterday become more of a memory, you replace them with others. It is, in fact, rather unlikely that your best friends of five years ago are the same ones you would mention as being your best friends today.

The degree of change we experience in our interpersonal relationships can be, from one point of view, cause for concern. It may be that we have entered a “psychological ice age” and that, except for “occasional bursts of warmth, often fueled by sex after a few cocktails, truly intimate encounters have begun to disappear from civilized life” [17]. Certainly in many of our day-to-day communication transactions, we operate in “reciprocal ignorance” of each other [231]. Do you know anything or care about the lives of the people who sell you groceries, clothes, and gasoline, and do they know anything at all about you? If the people in your life are transitory, why should you attempt to establish any meaningful communication with them?

On the more optimistic side, our degree of autonomy and anonymity can provide benefits. If you are unhappy with your situation, you can often change it. A new job and friends can provide “breathing room” for you to maximize your potential and lead the type of life that suits you. And just because you slide by hundreds of thousands of people daily does not mean that you are incapable of forming meaningful relationships with select people. It may be that our mobility provides us with more acquaintances and fewer friends but the friendships we do have are highly engaging and meaningful [148]. Whatever your position is on this issue, it is clear that communication relationships are a very significant part of our lives. In almost all professions, for instance, “people spend approximately three-fourths of their waking time communicating with others” [429]. Even in highly technical occupations such as research and development, “communication with people, not equipment, is the principal focus of activity” [250]. Communication with others is an inescapable factor of our existence.

DYADIC RELATIONSHIP TYPES AND FUNCTIONS

This book focuses on dyadic communication—transactions between two people. Any communication transaction, whether it be fleeting or

recurring, face-to-face or mediated, is a form of dyadic communication. The pure form of dyadic communication occurs when the two participants are in a *face-to-face* situation, where both are attending to the other's communication cues, and it takes place in a variety of contexts and relationships. Talking over a cup of coffee, having an intense argument with a loved one, greeting someone on the sidewalk, or purchasing a new coat from a clerk are all forms of dyadic communication.

The basic dyadic processes occur in all types of contexts and within an incredible array of relationship types. The following is a small listing of some of the possible types of relationships.

- I. Romantic relationships
 - A. Cross-sex relationships such as husband or wife, fiancé, lover, boyfriend or girlfriend, spouse, paramour, beau, steady, flame, mate, sweetheart, or just a casual dating partner.
 - B. Same-sex relationships such as gay and lesbian relationships, which use labels such as partner, lover, friend, and roommate.
- II. Friendships

All friendship types, cross-sex or same-sex, using such labels as best friend, close friends, "just friends," casual friends, pal, confidant, buddy, and others.
- III. Family relationships

All types where the participants are called brother, sister, aunt, uncle, grandparents, parents, stepparents, siblings, stepsister and stepbrother, among others.
- IV. Work and function-based relationships

Examples are such relations as professor–student, co-worker, colleague, schoolmate, pastor–parishioner, and supervisor–subordinate, among others.

Obviously, the list of possible relationships is almost endless, with new terms often being coined to capture the diversity of relationships. For example, with the blending of families, do children have four sets of grandparents or two sets of grandparents and two sets of step-grandparents? As Knapp, Ellis, and Williams [261] have noted, the array of relationship types is quite diverse. In their research they used sixty-two different labels for dyadic relationships. Providing an exhaustive list of such relationships is unnecessary, but the point should be clear. We have a diversity of dyadic relationships available [513].

Dyadic relationships can also be examined from the perspective of the *functions* that they serve, rather than on the basis of the category of the relationship. The functional bases of dyadic relationships are complex and varied, but we can find some provocative results in the research that is available. Friendship, for instance, can serve a lot of different functions. Caldwell and Peplau [88] found that for women friendship serves the primary function of the "sharing of feelings." For men, however, friendship is oriented "more towards the sharing of physical activities," such as skiing together. To be sure, not all men



Relationships between co-workers may serve many functions, just as friendships and romantic relationships do.

and women pick friends for only these purposes, but the respondents in the Caldwell and Peplau study consistently noted that their friends served these functions for them.

Other dyadic relationships can serve diverse functions, just as do friendships. When I was an undergraduate student, there was one professor in particular who served an important function for me. Through my association with him—he was the debate coach and I was a debater—I began to identify with him. While Dr. Marsh served as an important role model for me and greatly influenced my own decision to become a college professor, for my debate partner, Lynn, he served another function—that of getting us to tournaments. The functions he served for us were quite different, yet he was the debate coach for both of us. The functions that one can serve for another in a dyadic relationship are influenced by, but not totally determined by, the category of the relationship. In my small city there is an organization devoted to linking volunteer counselors with delinquent boys and girls. The program is modeled after the “partners” approach and stresses to the volunteers that their role is to form a “friendship” with the younger kids. Although the relationship is one of “assistance” or “helper–helpee,” it serves functions that are a blend between friendship and big brother or sister.

A number of scholars have attempted to pinpoint the functions our relationships serve for us. Weiss [524], for instance, stresses that relationships provide for intimacy, social integration, opportunity for nurturant behavior, reassurance of worth, assistance, and guidance. For

Weiss these functions are served by a variety of relationships, ranging from friendships to work relationships to helper–helpee relationships. One of the most straightforward treatments of the functions that relationships serve is from Bennis et al. [48], who suggest that our interpersonal relationships serve the four following functions:

1. *Expression of feelings.* The relationship allows the participants to express their emotions, both about the outside world and the relationship itself.
2. *Confirmation.* This function is served in a relationship when your sense of self is confirmed by the other. It answers the question “Who am I?” in relation to others around you.
3. *Change or influence.* In this type of relationship, the participants come together for the primary purpose of change—having impact on one another. Influence situations can range from persuasion to therapy.
4. *Creation and work.* These relational functions are instrumental—some goal or task outside the relationship itself is served.

Other scholars have addressed the functions served by specific types of relationships [554, 523, 104, 547, 560]. Skipper and Nass [462] for instance, deal with the functions that dating relationships serve for people. They speculate that dating serves one or more of these functions for the dyadic partners:

1. A form of recreation.
2. A form of socialization.
3. A means of status grading and status achievement.
4. A form of courtship.

Clearly, one category of a dyadic relationship can serve a variety of functions for either the same individual or for distinct persons. If person A is dating someone, it may be as a form of “raising his status” while another may simply see dating as a form of recreation—better than playing cards. While research on the functions served by our dyadic relationships is rather scattered, we can provide three conclusions about dyadic functions.

First, there are some consistent differences between the types of relationships [216]. For instance, there are differences between romantic relationships and kin or family relationships. Similarly, there are general differences between relationships with your peers and your family members. These generalized differences between relationships are used to distinguish between them. For instance, when we talk of close personal relationships involving sharing important information with others, close friends and romantic partners might qualify as people with whom we would share such information, but others, such as the neighbor we seldom see, would not. Second, even though there are global differences between relationship types, a given function can be served by more than one relationship [545]. A woman’s husband may provide for some of her intimacy needs, such as close contact, sexual expression, and commitment to another human. And her close

friend may provide for all the same intimacy needs except sex. In addition, one's closest confidant could be a same-sex friend, lover, twin sister, or someone sharing one's hobbies. Finally, a relationship can serve a variety of functions [216]. For example, in a relationship with one's employer, one's self-esteem and sense of self-worth may be bolstered at the same time that work is accomplished. Many of us have had a relationship that began on a limited basis and then expanded to other realms over time. Such is the case when a student becomes a friend of a former teacher.

The finest distinctions between relationships occur when we examine the *functions* rather than the *category* of the relationship. The actual quality of a relationship is more dependent on the type of interaction than it is on the category of the relationship [348]. One way to distinguish between dyadic relationships is based on the degree of pair

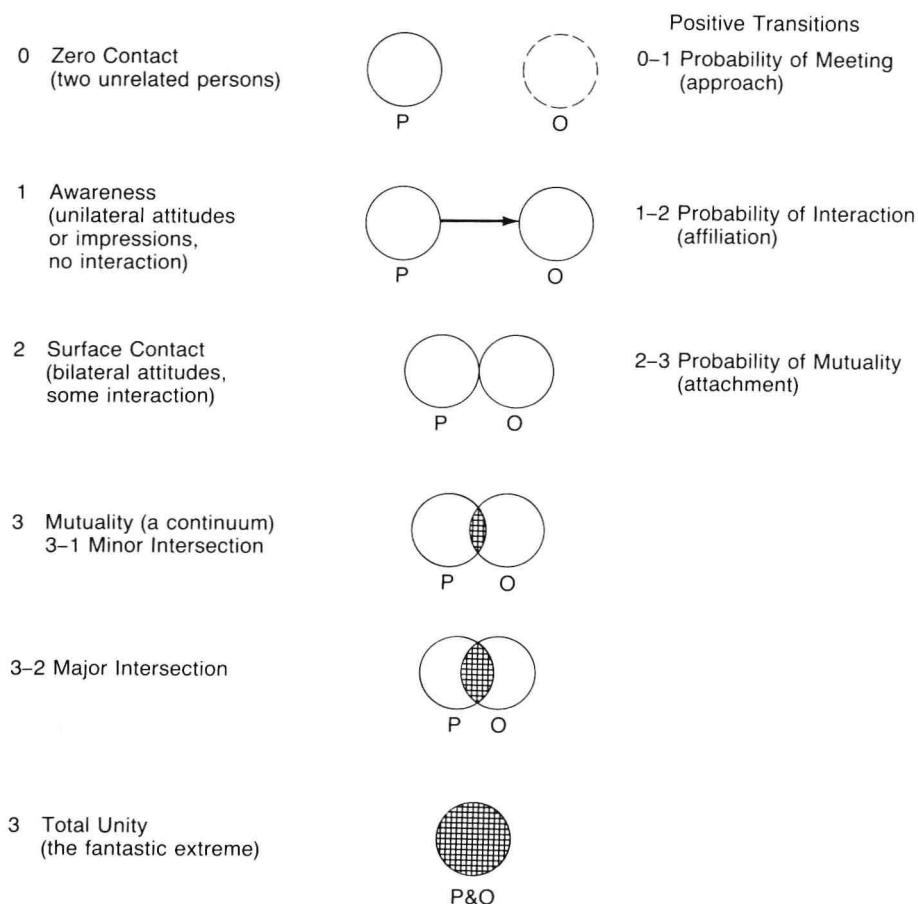


Figure 1-1. Degrees of pair relatedness. Reprinted by permission of the authors from George Levinger and J. D. Shoek, *Attraction in Relationship*. Copyright 1978 by George Levinger and J. D. Shoek.