Sexual Relationships, Love, & Communication

Dr. Alberto Pimentel Jr
Social Exchange Theory

The development of a relationship reflects the unfolding of social exchanges.

The rewards and costs of maintaining the relationship as opposed to ending it.

Positive factors encourage partners to maintain and enhance the relationship.

Negative factors encourage partners to let it deteriorate.
ABCDE’s of Romantic Relationships

- **A-Attraction**
- **B-Building**
- **C-Continuation**
- **D-Deterioration**
- **E-Ending (Termination)**
ABCDE’s of Romantic Relationships:  
Attraction

- **Attraction** occurs when two people become aware of each other and find one another appealing.
ABCDE’s of Romantic Relationships: Attraction

- Factors that increase attraction:
  - Good Mood
  - Physical Attractiveness
  - Similarity in Attitudes
  - Mutual Liking
ABCDE’s of Romantic Relationships: Attraction

**Studies Indicate:**

- **Heterosexual men tend to focus on sex and fun (when choosing to build a relationship).**

- **Heterosexual women tend to focus on communication and reciprocity (when choosing to build a relationship).**
ABCDE’s of Romantic Relationships: Attraction

Studies Indicate:

- Homosexual men are more likely to entertain sexual behavior early (when choosing to build a relationship).

- Homosexual women are more likely to be relatively cautious (when choosing to build a relationship).
ABCDE’s of Romantic Relationships: Building

- **Small Talk:**
  - Superficial conversation.
  - Allows exchange of information.
  - Stresses breadth of topic coverage rather than in-depth discussion.
  - Allows people to explore similarities and attractions.
ABCDE’s of Romantic Relationships: Building

- Small talk begins with the opening line...
- Verbal salutes
  - (Good evening)
- Personal Inquiries
  - (How are you doing?)
- Compliments
  - (You look amazing!)
ABCDEF’s of Romantic Relationships: Building

- References to your mutual surroundings
  - *(What do you think of that painting?)*

- References to people or events outside the immediate setting
  - *(Have you been following the Dodgers?)*

- References to the other person’s behavior
  - *(I couldn’t help noticing you were sitting alone.)*

- References to your own behavior or to yourself
  - *(Hi, my name is _____.)*
ABCDE’s of Romantic Relationships: Building

- **Self-disclosure:**
  - The revelation of personal and sometimes, intimate information... opening up.
  - Research shows that intimate information should not be disclosed too early in the relationship.
  - Rapid self-disclosure is the norm online.
  - If the initial self-disclosure has been mutually rewarding, the individuals may develop feelings of liking for each other.
ABCDE’s of Romantic Relationships: Building

- Probing phase of building a relationship.
- People seek common ground and check out feelings of attraction.
- Men tend to be less willing to engage in self-disclosure.
- Women tend to be more willing to engage in self-disclosure.
Seek ways to introduce variety and maintain interest.

Show that one cares and has trust for the other.

Mutuality: Members of a couple come to regard themselves as “we”, no longer two “I’s”.

A sign that the relationship will continue.
HOW TO BUILD A LASTING RELATIONSHIP:

1. CUT ON DOTTED LINE.
2. ROTATE 180 DEGREES.
Intimacy:

Feelings of closeness and connectedness that are marked by sharing one’s inmost thoughts and feelings.

Key ingredient to a passionate relationship.

Involves trust, caring, and acceptance.

Can be emotionally intimate without being sexually intimate.
Intimacy:

- Important for psychological well-being.
- Intimacy and self-esteem...too little or too much self-esteem may interfere with our ability to be intimate.
- Caring is an emotional bond that allows intimacy to develop.
**Abcde’s of Romantic Relationships: Continuation**

- **Mutual Cyclical Growth:**
  - The need for one’s partner promotes commitment.
  - The commitment promotes acts that enhance the relationship.
  - These acts build trust.
  - Allows for an increase in each partner’s commitment to the relationship.
ABCDE’s of Romantic Relationships: Deterioration

Factors that can lead to the dissolution of a relationship include:

- Boredom
- Negative evaluation of partner
- Forgetting or ignoring important dates
- Perceived inequity in the relationship
- General dissatisfaction
- Jealousy
ABCDE’s of Romantic Relationships: Deterioration

Jealousy:

- Aroused by suspected threat of rival.
- Evident across cultures, but more intense and frequent in cultures with strong traditional male gender roles.

- Reduces affection and self-esteem.
- May increase feelings of insecurity, rejection, anxiety, and mistrust.
ABCDE’s of Romantic Relationships: Deterioration

Jealousy:

- Is a common reason why relationships fail.
- Causes include both past experiences and personality traits.
- “Normal” vs. “Obsessional” jealousy.
ABCDE’s of Romantic Relationships: Deterioration

- **Jealousy & Evolutionary Theory:**
  - Men are more jealous of sexual infidelity.
  - Women are more jealous of emotional infidelity.

- **Jealousy & Cognitive Theory:**
  - More jealousy when infidelity is attributed to internal causes (personal choice/attraction), and less when attributed to external causes (alcohol).
ABCDE's of Romantic Relationships: Deterioration

Responses to the breakdown of a relationship:

- Active responses to deterioration:
  - Doing things that may enhance the relationship.
  - Deciding to end the relationship.

- Passive responses to deterioration:
  - Waiting for something to happen.
  - Doing little or nothing.
ABCDE’s of Romantic Relationships: Ending

- Reasons for ending relationships:
  - Partners find little satisfaction in the affiliation.
  - Barriers to leaving the relationship are low.
  - Alternative partners are available.
  - Problems in communication exist.
  - Jealousy.
ABCDE’s of Romantic Relationships: Ending

- People differ in how well they deal with breakups.

- **Anxious People:**
  - Preoccupied with ex-partner.
  - Suffer emotional and physical distress.
  - Attempt to reestablish relationship.
  - May experience anger or vengefulness.
ABCDE’s of Romantic Relationships: Ending

- Emotionally Secure People:
  - Seek social support from friends and families.
ABCDE’s of Romantic Relationships: Ending

- **Stalking:**
  - Following or observing a person persistently, especially because of obsession with the person.
  - Can occur online as well as in person.
ABCDE’s of Romantic Relationships: Ending

- **Loneliness:**
  - A state of painful social isolation.
  - Feeling cut off from others.
  - Depression.
  - Associated with physical and psychological problems.
ABCDE’s of Romantic Relationships:
Ending

- Effects of Loneliness:
  - Low self-confidence
  - Introversion
  - Unhappiness
  - Emotional instability
Satisfaction in Relationships

- Conflict itself is not necessarily destructive.

- Resolution style is important.

- Negative outcomes associated with defensiveness; negative non-verbals; stonewalling; excessive agreeability

- Positive outcomes associated with displays of human, empathy and affection; mutual effort; listening non-defensively.
Communication is the key to healthy relationships.
Communication Skills: Getting the Conversation Started

- Discuss the difficulties of talking about “controversial” topics such as sex, finances, children, etc.
- Pick an appropriate time and place to discuss an issue.
- Request permission to bring up a topic.
- Let your partner know it is okay to give feedback.
Communication Skills: Skilled Listening Involves...

- Active Listening
- Reflect and paraphrase
- Reinforcing the other person’s willingness to communicate
- Showing that one values one’s partner even when disagreement exists
Communication Skills: Learn About One’s Partner’s Needs

- Ask close-ended questions
- Use self-disclosure to develop intimacy
- Grant permission for the other person to say something that might be upsetting
Communication Skills: Delivering Criticism

- Evaluate your motives
- Deliver criticism in private
- Be specific about behaviors
- Express displeasure in terms of your own feelings
- Avoid attacking your partner’s personality
- Keep criticism and complaints to the present
- Express criticism constructively
- Express criticism positively and with a concrete request
Communication Skills: Receiving Criticism

- Clarifying one’s goals for the relationship
- Ask clarifying questions
- Acknowledge and paraphrase the criticism
- If at fault, admit it and work to solve problem