

Conflict and Negativity

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Overview

- **Prevalence of Negativity in Close Relationships**
- **Arguments**
 - “Bad” Tactics
 - “Good” Tactics
- **Break-up and Divorce**

Warning!!!

- Many statistics too be presented.
- Just know the general trend.

Negativity in Close Relationships

- Ryder & Olson: much more negative talk in married couples than strangers
- Herzberger: most of peer violence occurs between siblings
- Kidnapping mostly done by parents
 - Justice Department statistics of kidnapping children:
24% stranger-kidnapping,
49% family kidnapping,
27% acquaintance kidnapping
- Sexual abuse often done by family member
 - 29% of child sexual abuse offenders are relatives, 60% are acquaintances, and only 11% are strangers.

Murder in Close Relationships

- Among all female murder victims in 1996, 30% were slain by husbands or boyfriends, while 3% of the male victims were slain by wives or girlfriends.
- Of people killed by intimates, 37% are male and 63% females.
- When women kill, it is likely to be an intimate, including a child, 61% (for men, 23%).

Explanations

- Opportunity
- Norm of politeness to strangers
- We learn we can be mean to those we love
 - not be subject to severe sanctions behavior
 - will not lead to relationship dissolution; partner committed to relationship
- Seeing the other as part of self (Aron & Aron)
 - high standards for the partner
 - sees partner's behavior as one's own

Emotions and Relationships

- Intimate relationships are the places where people express emotions.
- Obvious case of positive emotions
- But also negative emotions



Arguments

- Almost all relationships have arguments.
- The issue is not whether the relationship has arguments, but rather how arguments are handled.
- **By observing what goes on during arguments, one can see if the relationship will last.**



I. Tactics with Poor Outcomes

- Physical Violence
 - Higher prevalence than might be thought
 - Best guess at least 25% and in the United States
- Not just the poor
- Gender Differences
 - Quantity: evidence of women as violent as men (very often violence is reciprocal)
 - Quality: women much more likely to be injured than are men

II. Tactics with Poor Outcomes

- Verbal abuse
- Avoidance/withdrawal
- Negative escalation or spiral (Gottman)
- Negative partner attributions (blaming partner)
- Kitchen sinking
- Saying “yes but”

“Good” Tactics as Recommended by Experts

- stay on the issue
- avoid global statements
 - say and think "I feel" versus "You are"
 - use XYZ statements (When you do X, in situation Y, I feel Z.)
- withdraw when negative affect intensifies
- resolve the issue



Duck's Stages of Dissolution

- intra-psychic: feeling dissatisfied
- dyadic: sharing dissatisfaction with partner
- social: sharing dissatisfaction with others
- grave dressing: developing a face-saving **account**

The Account of Breakup

- a narrative or story
- explains how one got into the relationship and how it ended
- constructed with help of friends and perhaps a therapist
- usually makes the “teller” look good (i.e., is face saving)

The Changing Divorce Rate



- **Long Term Increase**
- **Especially Dramatic Increase After World War II (pent up demand)**
- **Some Evidence of a that Decline Has Stopped and Even Reversed**
- **Higher Divorce Rate for Those Who Have Previously Cohabitated**

Question?

In the last few years the divorce rate in the United States appears to have declined. Why?

Answer?

- **People waiting to get married.**
- **States with joint custody and “men’s” right have lower divorce rates.**

Next Class

Social Networks

