Handbook of Personal Relationships

Theory, Research and Interventions

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A Dialectical Perspective on Communication Strategies in Relationship Development

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ABSTRACT

Dialectical theory provides the framework for discussing the research literature in relationship strategies, i.e. the communicative actions by which parties establish, maintain, and dissolve their personal relationships. The strategic management of three basic contradictions (autonomy–connection, novelty–predictability, openness–closedness) is discussed for each of four dialectical phases of relationship development.

For the last decade, I have been attempting to identify the strategic communicative actions by which personal relationships are constituted, maintained, and disengaged. I have shared my own research and that of fellow relationship theorists and researchers in many classrooms during this period of time. Many of my students react to this body of research and theory as I myself have come to regard it: a somewhat sterile portrait stripped of many of the complexities we often experience in our relationships—their paradoxes, inconsistencies, and contradictions. The purpose of this chapter is to advance a dialectical approach to the study of personal relationships, a perspective which emphasizes the utility of studying relationship contradictions. In turn, this dialectical framework will provide the foundation for examining the relationship strategies research.

Although threads of dialectical thinking have emerged among several relationship theorists and researchers (e.g. Altman, Vinsel and Brown, 1981; Bochner, 1984), a whole theoretical cloth has yet to be woven which advances a dialectical theory of relationships. This essay does not pretend to be such a

theoretical cloth, but it does attempt to bring together disparate threads of dialectical thought in order to examine the relationship strategies literature.

Despite the multiplicity of meanings with which the term 'dialectic' has been used, the two features that are common across various dialectical theories are *process* and *contradiction* (Cornforth, 1968). The centrality of the process concept to dialectical thinking leads to a theoretical interest in development in contrast to a focus on static or stable states of being. Such development is not limited in the instance of relationships to the opening phase of a relationship's history but occurs throughout a relationship's entire history. Change, in turn, is caused by the struggle and tension of contradiction. A contradiction is formed whenever two tendencies or forces are interdependent (the dialectical principle of unity) yet mutually negate one another (the dialectical principle of negation).

A dialectical approach to personal relationships provides a relationship-level perspective to complement the individual-level theories which dominate the personal relationships literature—social penetration (Altman and Taylor, 1973), its parent theory of social exchange (Roloff, 1981), and uncertainty reduction theory (Berger and Bradac, 1982). These latter theories share the assumption that relationship dynamics can be explained adequately by understanding the individuals who comprise the relationship. Theoretical frustration with this atomistic orientation is a frequently expressed complaint in the relationship communication literature; however, the relationships field still displays a paucity of genuine relationship-level theories. Although the dialectical contradictions described below are experienced and acted upon by the individual parties, they are situated *in the relationship* between the parties. These basic dialectical oppositions or tensions form the exigence for communicative action between the parties and constitute the basis of change and development in the relationship.

Given that the dominant theories of relationship development are located at the individual level, it is not surprising that the relationship strategies research commonly conceptualizes a 'strategy' as action by which the individual accomplishes his/her goals. Given this markedly individualistic orientation, relationship strategies researchers assume the burden of understanding and explaining individual motives and how those translate into action plans and interaction procedures (see Berger in this volume). In contrast, from a relationship-level perspective, a 'strategy' is conceived less in terms of individual goal achievement and more in terms of its efficacy in response to situational press, in this instance dialectical contradictions. The difference in perspective is subtle but important. The individualistic perspective heads one down the theoretic path of cognitive psychology, whereas a relationship perspective such as dialectical theory focuses attention outwards on the relational situation.

The remainder of this chapter is organized into four sections. The first posits basic dialectical contradictions that comprise personal relationships. The second presents a typology of strategies that are responsive to dialectical contradictions. Section three examines the relationship strategies research through this dialectical lens. Fourth and finally, implications for future research are presented.

BASIC CONTRADICTIONS IN PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Given that relationships are processes of change produced by the clash of opposing tendencies, what exactly are the basic contradictions of relational life? Three bipolar pairs can be identified which meet the conditions of both unity and negation, thus constituting dialectical contradictions. As discussed below, personal relationships require both autonomy and connection, both novelty and predictability, and both openness and closedness. Further, the poles of a given pair mutually negate one another as logical opposites. Dialectical theorists attempt to identify the basic or principal contradiction around which a web of secondary contradictions coheres. In the context of personal relationships, the principal contradiction is autonomy vs connection, with the two remaining opposing pairs serving as secondary contradictions.

The Centrality of the Autonomy–Connection Dialectic

This contradiction is so central to the essence of relationships on definitional grounds alone that it can be regarded as the principal contradiction. No relationship can exist by definition unless the parties sacrifice some individual autonomy. However, too much connection paradoxically destroys the relationship because the individual identities become lost (Askham, 1976). Simultaneously, an individual's autonomy can be conceptualized only in terms of separation from others. But too much autonomy paradoxically destroys the individual's identity, because connections with others are the 'stuff' of which identity is made (Lock, 1986). The tension between autonomy and connection appears to be phenomenologically real to people as they reflect on their own relationship experiences, surfacing as an underlying theme in recollected relationship turning points (Baxter and Bullis, 1986), in recollected ambivalence about committing to the relational partner (Braiker and Kelley, 1979), and in verbalized reflections about what their relationships are like (Carbaugh, 1984; Rawlins, 1983a). The question for this chapter is how the autonomy–connection dialectic is communicatively managed in relationship development.

The Novelty–Predictability Dialectic

Whether one consults uncertainty reduction theory (Berger and Bradac, 1982) or pragmatic systems theory (Fisher, 1978), the necessity of predictability and pattern in relationships is well recognized. However, equally necessary for relationships is the opposite quality of novelty or unpredictability (see Berger in this volume). Pragmatic systems theorists refer to a dysfunctional condition known as 'schismogenesis', which can occur with overly rigidified, i.e. predictable, interaction (Fisher, 1978). Learning theorists recognize the declining affective arousal and the ultimate emotional deadening of a relationship that can occur when patterns are overly repeated and predictable (Kelvin, 1977). In short, relationships require both novelty and predictability, leaving relationship parties a challenging dilemma with which to cope.

The Openness–Closedness Dialectic

A relationship's need for both information openness and information closedness has been noted by several relationship theorists (e.g. Altman, Vinsel and Brown, 1981; Bochner, 1984; LaFollette and Graham, 1986). Open disclosure between the relationship parties is a necessary condition for intimacy, but openness creates vulnerabilities either for oneself, the other, or the relationship that necessitate information closedness (Rawlins, 1983b). This dilemma not only occurs in the private communication between relationship parties but surfaces as well in the public presentation of the relationship to others. On the one hand, the parties require privacy or information closedness from others to establish intimacy. On the other hand, the relationship requires public recognition, which necessitates information openness (Leslie, Huston and Johnson, 1986). As with the other contradictions reviewed here, the relationship parties must grapple with this difficult dilemma of openness–closedness through their strategic communicative choices.

These three contradictions probably do not exhaust the set of dialectical dilemmas which face relationship parties. Further, they have been discussed separately from one another for ease of presentation, but in actuality they form an interdependent web, as becomes evident in the following section.

STRATEGIC RESPONSES TO CONTRADICTION

What constitutes a strategic response to contradiction? The typology of strategies suggested below draws heavily upon two research programs technically outside the domain of relationships research (O'Keefe and Delia, 1982; Bavelas, 1985). The first strategy is one of *selection*, in which relationship parties repeatedly select actions consistent with one polarity of the contradiction. Strategic selection produces a dialectical transformation, with the selected polarity emerging as the dominant condition. Fitzpatrick's (1984) married traditionals, for example, appear to have employed the selection strategy in favor of connection, in contrast to the married types of separates and independents, who appear to have employed selection in the direction of autonomy.

The second strategy type, temporal/spatial separation, can take two forms. Relationship parties can attempt to respond to each polarity of a given contradiction at separate points in time, constituting the strategy of *cyclic alternation*. Altman, Vinsel and Brown (1981), for example, posit that the openness–closedness dialectic is managed with this strategy, resulting in relationship interaction characterized through time by alternating high disclosure and high privacy. The second form of this general strategy type is labelled *segmentation*, as the relationship parties distinguish mutually exclusive activity or content domains, each of which is responsive to one pole of a given contradiction. The openness–closedness dialectic, for instance, would be managed through segmentation if the parties targeted certain topics as appropriate for open disclosure and other topics as inappropriate for disclosure.

The final strategy type, integration, involves the attempt to respond simul-

taneously to both opposing tendencies in a contradiction. Three forms of this complex strategic type can be identified. The strategy of *integrative moderation* involves the use of neutralized messages which are biased towards neither polarity in a given contradiction. The small talk ritual in initial encounters illustrates nicely the moderation strategy. The strategy of *integrative disqualification* involves ambiguous or indirect communicative acts which avoid the explicit engagement of either polarity. Bavelas and her colleagues (Bavelas, 1985) have identified four dimensions of disqualification: content ambiguity over what is being said; speaker ambiguity concerning whose voice is being represented; target ambiguity over who is addressed in the message; and context ambiguity concerning what in the situation prompted the message. The final form of this general strategy type is *integrative reframing*, in which the parties attempt to redefine the contradiction and thereby transcend it. For example, a couple who redefine autonomy and connection such that the poles are no longer conceived as oppositional have enacted the reframing strategy.

It is difficult for several reasons to look to existing relationship strategies research to determine whether selection, cyclic alternation, segmentation, integrative moderation, integrative disqualification, and/or integrative reframing are present. The first obstacle in existing strategies research is the failure to collect truly dialectical data, i.e. simultaneous data about both polarities. Consider the openness–closedness contradiction as a basis of illustration. As Baxter and Wilmot (1985) have observed in their study of 'taboo topics' in relationships, scores on self-disclosure measures do not necessarily inform us about the dynamics of information closedness. Without dual information on openness and closedness, it is difficult to determine with confidence whether selection, cyclic alternation, and/or segmentation strategies are present. At best, the typical relationship strategies study considers but a single polarity of a single contradiction.

A second dialectically based criticism of extant relationship strategies research is its failure to collect longitudinal strategies data. Instead, 'one-shot' data are collected in which respondents indicate what strategy they would use or have used at a single point in time in order to accomplish some specified goal. The difficulty with this becomes evident in the example of openness–closedness. If a strategy of open disclosure is reported, for example, it might simply be a 'peak' of openness in a larger cyclic pattern in which periods of high openness are followed by periods of high closedness and *vice versa* (Altman, Vinsel and Brown, 1981). Data collected at but a single point in time preclude the researcher from differentiating selection modes of response from cyclic alternation modes.

Admittedly, several studies have collected longitudinal data on openness or self-disclosure (e.g. Hays, 1985). Unfortunately, variation in openness within a given relationship has generally been reduced to grist for the statistical least squares mill. If a best fitting line is fit to a cyclic alternation curve which plots variation in openness, the result will likely be a simple linear relationship stripped of cyclic 'bumps'. Reducing the data in this way ignores the pattern of sequential variations in openness from one encounter to another, or from one

strategic choice to another within a single encounter, and thus ignores as well the cyclic alternation response mode.

A third problem with existing research on relationship strategies is the relative crudeness with which strategies are studied. Strategies reduced to descriptors such as 'encourage responsiveness in the other', for example, lack the fine-grained linguistic data which are especially useful in detecting the three integration strategies.

Despite the limitations of existing relationship strategies research, it can be usefully considered from a dialectical perspective. Some of the research is suggestive of how dialectical contradictions are managed, and productive directions for future research can be raised in examining extant work through a dialectical lens.

STRATEGIC ACTION IN DIALECTICAL PHASES OF RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT

I have opted to organize the discussion of the relationship strategies research around what I believe are four phases in the principal contradiction of autonomy–connection. In organizing this discussion around autonomy–connection, I am oversimplifying the whole dialectical dynamic in suggesting that the other contradictions are fully synchronized with changes in the autonomy–connection contradiction. Although my hunch is that this tendency exists, I also suspect that there might be substantial departure from lock-step synchrony from relationship to relationship. Moreover, ordering phases numerically from one to four could suggest that all relationships evolve in this sequential manner; such a suggestion also greatly oversimplifies the dialectical process. Finally, it is important to appreciate that a given phase likely has fuzzy beginning and ending boundaries during which the dialectical change occurs. With these caveats in mind, each dialectical phase can now be turned to in more detail.

Phase 1: Autonomy to Connection

This phase is one of mutual exploration as the parties get to know one another and determine whether they want to form an interdependent relationship. Because the management of the secondary dialectical contradictions directly impacts the progress of the autonomy–connection dialectic, it is useful to organize the discussion around the secondary contradictions.

The novelty–predictability dialectic

The dialectically dominant condition during this period is either novelty or predictability, depending on what facet of the relationship is under consideration. At the individual level of analysis, the dominant condition is novelty or unpredictability given the limited information the parties have about each other. As the uncertainty reduction research documents, the relationship parties have a variety of ways of acquiring information about a new acquaintance (see Berger

in this volume). From the perspective of the interaction episode, however, the relationship during this period is characterized by the dominance of predictability, not novelty. This predictability occurs through the enactment of initial interaction scripts, i.e. highly structured interaction routines characterized by stock topics and actions (Douglas, 1984).

Paradoxically, predictability present in the enactment of structured, stock routines is likely to jeopardize uncertainty reduction at the individual level. If all the other party does is follow social scripts, one gains little insight into the other as an individual. If one also follows initial interaction scripts, the very information acquisition strategies necessary to acquire information about the other may not be employed (Kellermann, 1984a). Thus, some novelty in the form of deviation from the narrow scripts of initial interaction seems necessary. But if one does violate scripts and seeks information by excessive questioning or self-disclosure, the other party is likely to regard this as a violation of expected initial interaction routines and become even more hesitant to reveal information. Similarly, if the other departs significantly from initial scripts in revealing information, he or she is likely to be perceived negatively rather than accurately.

Unfortunately, as Kellermann (1984a) has noted, we have too little baseline knowledge about the expected and actual behaviors of initial interaction to understand how relationship parties cope interactively with this dialectical tension between novelty at the level of the person and predictability at the level of the interaction episode. However, existing relationship strategies research is suggestive of some response modes over others. The prevalence of the small talk ritual illustrates creative management of this contradiction through the strategy of integrative moderation. Small talk is ritualized activity, yet the parties have some modest opportunity to reveal unique information about themselves. The strategy of integrative disqualification is employed as well, given the work on indirectness summarized below in reference to the openness–closedness dialectic. In addition, it seems reasonable that relationship parties over time might employ the strategy of cyclic alternation, interspersing novel encounters rich in personality insights with the safety of routinized interaction scripts. Further, relationship parties might employ the strategy of segmentation, freeing up certain domains of their relational life for experimentation while maintaining highly scripted encounters in other domains.

The openness–closedness dialectic

Management of the novelty–predictability dialectic obviously implicates the openness–closedness contradiction. Maximum openness through high self-disclosure, for instance, would achieve uncertainty reduction at the person level during this initial relationship phase while constituting a novel departure from the scripts of initial interaction. In general, the relationship strategies research suggests that relationship parties are hesitant to make openness dominant over closedness in this initial interaction phase. Rather, the dialectical strategies of

integrative moderation, segmentation, and integrative disqualification appear evident.

As noted above, initial interaction scripts illustrate the dialectical strategy of integrative moderation in maintaining a delicate balance in the novelty–predictability contradiction. Such scripts also illustrate integrative moderation in managing the openness–closedness dialectic. Relationship parties engage in superficial self-disclosure activity, thereby demonstrating a willingness to be open without jeopardizing the safety of closedness about self.

The dialectical strategy of segmentation also appears to be employed by relationship parties during this phase. Certain topics can be discussed openly, whereas other topics are implicitly left closed. Negatively valenced information about self is left unstated, but so is explicit self-presentation about one's most favorable attributes for fear of reaping a negative reaction to perceived self-promotion (Godfrey, Jones and Lord, 1986). Similarly left unstated is one's liking for the other party as a potential relationship party (Baxter and Bullis, 1986). Although the other party can be encouraged to engage in meaningful self-disclosure, one is also socially limited in the amount and kinds of information which can be directly solicited about the other.

The fact that some information cannot be expressed openly does not mean that parties are prevented from its acquisition. Rather, the parties opt for indirect strategies, i.e. integrative disqualification. Prevented from self-promotion, relationship parties demonstrate indirectly through their actions that they are likeable. So-called affinity-seeking is accomplished by a variety of indirect strategies (Bell and Daly, 1984). For example, through their conversational style alone, parties can demonstrate that they are: trusting of others by engaging in confiding behavior; adaptable to others by keeping to the rules of conversation and granting control to the other as appropriate; similar to the other by expressing agreement; and trustworthy by keeping the other's confidences.

Indirectness is employed as well in signaling one's liking for the other party. A variety of indirect signaling strategies have been noted in the literature, all of which involve either the rendering of explicit reward, efforts to be in the other's physical presence, or displays of concern and supportiveness for the other's wants and needs (Baxter and Philpott, 1982; Bell and Daly, 1984; Brown and Levinson, 1978).

Also subject to indirect strategic action is acquisition of information about what the other party is 'really like'. Information about the other party is sought actively from his or her network associates, constituting one of the most valuable sources of information during this initial dialectical phase (Parks and Adelman, 1983). Paradoxically, however, seeking information from the other party's network may forsake relational privacy through public recognition that one is forming a relationship with the other party. Thus, an attempt to avoid openness internally in the relationship may entail openness externally to others.

If the parties navigate this maze of contradictions and emerge with the desire to become interdependent beyond casual acquaintanceship, the autonomy–con-

nection dialectical contradiction has experienced a transformation to connection as the dominant condition.

Phase 2: Autonomy and Connection

It is one thing for relationship parties to make a mental or social commitment to interdependence and quite another to work out the details of precisely what this interdependence will entail. This second phase reflects the 'working out' of the details of connection, particularly with regard to its implications for the individual selves in the relationship. How much freedom will the individual parties have outside the relationship? What rights and responsibilities will the individuals have to themselves, to one another, and to the relationship?

This phase is often characterized by ambivalence in the relationship parties as they wonder whether or not they are making a mistake in forming a bond with one another (Braiker and Kelley, 1979; Huston *et al.*, 1981; Lloyd and Cate, 1985a). Correlated with this ambivalence is an increase in conflict and instability between the partners. Ambivalence, conflict, and instability set the scene for the two secondary dialectical contradictions to reappear in this phase in somewhat different form than during the initial dialectical phase.

The novelty–predictability dialectic

Ambivalence and its companions of conflict and instability mandate a need for predictability. However, unlike the predictability of knowing the other as an individual which drives phase one, this phase deals with a qualitatively different order of predictability, i.e. certainty about the state of the relationship. Several dialectical strategies are employed by relationship parties in an attempt to realize predictability as the dominant condition over novelty. Integrative disqualification, or indirectness, is probably the foremost way in which parties attempt to gain predictability over the state of the relationship. Because indirectness engages the issue of openness, it is discussed below under the openness–closedness dialectic.

In addition to their indirect efforts, relationship parties in this phase of the autonomy–connection dialectic initiate a variety of symbols and rituals which strategically lend predictability to the relationship. Relationship parties develop a private code of idiomatic expressions, including, among others, nicknames, affection phrases, sexual codewords, and private jokes (Hopper, Knapp and Scott, 1981). But such tokens of the relationship's intimate private culture are not limited to linguistic idioms. In a recent study of friendship and romantic relationship symbols, Baxter (1987a) found a rich domain of physical objects, songs, movies, special memories, special places, and nonlinguistic behavioral rituals which the parties identified as symbolic of their respective relationships. Trivial and insignificant to an outsider, these relationship symbols and rituals segment certain facets of the relationship as sources of predictability (Baxter, 1987a; Bochner, 1984; Oring, 1984). Such symbols and rituals are concrete

metacommunicative 'statements' about the nebulous qualities of intimacy, caring, and so forth that the parties are seeking to define. Because symbols and rituals emerge from a time-specific situation in the relationship's history, they are constant reminders of the relationship's past and thus bridge the certainty of the known past with the uncertainty of the unknown present and future. Symbols and rituals also serve as guides for what is valued or expected and thus promote predictability in behavioral actions as well. Many symbols and rituals serve to establish or maintain the boundaries of the relationship through public presentation to others, thereby helping to insure the stability of the relationship as a social unit.

Although the relationship parties are striving to reduce the relational uncertainty which characterizes this second autonomy–connection phase, the relationship at this formative stage also has novelty requirements if it is to survive. Of necessity, relationship parties must break beyond the highly structured scripts of initial interaction if they are to expand their interdependence. Indeed, the presence of some unique, nonscripted episode is often regarded retrospectively by the parties as a significant turning point in their relationship's development (Baxter and Bullis, 1986).

During this dialectical phase, relationships have two primary sources of novelty—symbols/rituals and conflict. Many symbols and rituals are playful in nature, paradoxically providing a constant and predictable source of stimulation, fun, and novelty for the relationship parties (Baxter, 1987a; Oring, 1984). The relationship pair which agrees to 'do something different' once a month thus has the best of both predictability and novelty worlds, a true integrative strategy.

Although conflict can constitute a threat to connection, it is also perhaps the best single source of novelty for the relationship. The relationship parties are forced through conflict to explore new relational terrain heretofore avoided (Braiker and Kelley, 1979).

Early conflicts appear to involve a positivity bias, i.e. the other's faults and incompatibility with the other are not perceived as the causes of early relational conflicts (Kelly, Huston and Cate, 1985; Lloyd and Cate, 1985a). This positivity bias is paradoxically a liability as well as an asset in terms of managing the autonomy–connection tension. On the liability side, Kelly, Huston and Cate (1985) have argued that early relational conflict is 'misattended' by the relationship parties because of this bias. That is, conflict during this period can serve as an informative warning signal about the other person and about compatibility between the parties, but the parties are not likely to attend to such warnings during this phase.

However, the positivity bias also serves as an asset. Because such conflicts are less likely to become attributed to the other, the parties are more likely to employ integrative conflict management strategies, i.e. strategies which display cooperative, prosocial problem-solving as opposed to competitive strategies (Sillars, 1981). However, only so much conflict can occur before it begins to reap negative consequences for the relationship, an issue developed further below under the fourth dialectical phase.

The openness–closedness dialectic

As mentioned above, indirectness, i.e. integrative disqualification, is used by relational parties to reduce their uncertainty about the state of their formative relationship. Open discussion of the relationship is the foremost 'taboo topic' reported by developing relationship parties out of fear that such directness would jeopardize the fragility of the forming connection (Baxter and Wilmot, 1985). Thus, although the parties are probably disclosing more about themselves as individuals during this phase as opposed to the first phase, they appear to segment the state of the relationship as inappropriate for openness.

Parties employ a variety of indirect 'secret test' strategies by which to gain predictability about the state of the relationship (Baxter and Wilmot, 1984). Some of these 'tests' ironically seem quite negative given the growing intimacy between the relationship parties. For example, parties report using so-called endurance tests, i.e. making the relationship costly for the other to determine his or her upper limits of commitment. Relationship parties also report using separation tests designed to determine whether affection can endure physical separation of the parties. Triangle tests are also reported, in which a real or hypothetical rival is introduced to determine whether the other party will become jealous. Yet another testing strategy employs indirect hints which are sufficiently obtuse to test whether the other party is really sensitive and high in empathy.

Two additional 'secret test' strategies sacrifice the closedness of relational privacy by making the relationship's existence publicly known. The public presentation testing strategy, for example, involves the public disclosure that the other is one's relationship partner in order to observe his or her reaction. Last, the interrogation test involves the direct questioning of third parties from the partner's social network about the other's feelings concerning the relationship.

The symbols and rituals which emerge during this phase of development also are relevant to the openness–closedness dialectic. The meanings of symbols and rituals do not reside in the phenomena themselves but rather in the minds of interpreters who rarely engage in explicit sharing of their separate meanings (Baxter, 1987a). Thus, symbols and rituals are wonderfully ambiguous stimuli which constitute integrative strategic management of the openness–closedness contradiction.

It is apparent that the same two secondary contradictions which were present in the first phase emerge in different forms during the second phase of the autonomy–connection dialectic. This pattern of transformed contradictions continues into the third developmental phase, discussed next.

Phase 3: Autonomy–Connection Synthesis

With the continued interaction, intimacy, and interdependence of its parties, a relationship will likely experience a dialectical synthesis in which autonomy and connection are no longer regarded as opposites but have become functionally reinforcing of one another. Of course, as Fitzpatrick's (1984) research on

traditional, independent, separate, and mixed couple types makes evident, this synthesis will not take identical form from one relationship to another.

The novelty–predictability dialectic

The major relational problem that faces relationship parties during this developmental phase is how to sustain their particular autonomy–connection synthesis in the face of a dialectical predisposition for change. Paradoxically, two sources of predictability in the relationship serve as the catalysts for this change. First, predictability in the form of the established routines of daily relational life can easily lead to reward satiation, reduced emotional arousal, and progressive emotional deadening of the relationship's emotional life (Berscheid, 1983; Kelvin, 1977).

The second form of predictability, the relationship partners' perception that they know one another well, is a catalyst for cognitive deadening and its consequences for relational stability. As Sillars and Scott (1983) have observed, familiarity breeds overconfidence which in turn can lead to exaggeration of one's knowledge about the other, reduced vigilance in keeping current on information about the other, and idealization about the other's qualities. Of course, the reality of day-to-day interdependence shatters the illusion of full predictability and knowledge about the other, leaving the parties with some uncertainty and reduced relational satisfaction (Huston, McHale and Crouter, 1986).

In short, relationships do not sustain themselves automatically and require substantial relational work from their parties. Such relational work ideally prevents the relationship from experiencing excessive predictability and its consequent emotional/cognitive deading, yet simultaneously, such relationship activity must assure reasonable stability in the parties' constructed autonomy--connection synthesis.

Ethnographers of communication have found the 'work' metaphor salient in people's talk about their relationships (Katriel and Philipsen, 1981; Owen, 1984), for example reference to 'working on' one's relationship or 'making the relationship work'. Recently, relationship strategies researchers have begun to examine the strategies which constitute this work on behalf of the relationship's maintenance (Ayres, 1983; Baxter and Dindia, 1987; Bell, Daly and Gonzalez, 1985; Dindia and Baxter, 1987; Shea and Pearson, 1986). Several of these strategies are clearly preventative in nature, functioning to prevent the onset of emotional or cognitive deadening. For example, through such diverse actions as calling one's partner in midday 'just to say hi', giving the partner a surprise gift, or planning an elaborate joint trip, relationship partners can prevent reward satiation by introducing novel displays of affection towards the other. In addition, relationship partners appear to have several strategies by which to maintain information vigilance and perspective-taking, including such actions as spending increased time with the partner, sharing information about one another's days, and taking care to really listen to what the partner is saying.

Relationship parties have a variety of repair strategies which attempt to

restore the relationship once it has deteriorated. Some of these strategies involve an attempt to link the present to the past, for example commemorating an event such as an anniversary or jointly reminiscing about the past. Other strategies attempt to restore the relationship by emphasizing the long-term future of the relationship, for example, a couple's decision to undertake a house purchase. Still other strategies attempt to restore the relationship through antisocial brinkmanship, pushing the relationship to the point of crisis with the hope that it will spring back to the relative security of its prior state. Relationship parties also appear to employ a variety of strategies which attempt to restore the relationship through an increase in rewards to the other, for example favor-doing or interacting in especially thoughtful and caring ways.

To date, the research has reported mixed results on the association between maintenance/repair strategy use and relationship satisfaction (Bell, Daly and Gonzalez, 1985; Dindia and Baxter, 1987). This inconsistency in findings probably reflects the complexity of this phase. As Duck (1984a) has observed, maintenance/repair is not a single monolithic phenomenon but rather a system of actions appropriately matched to particular problems. Thus, for example, the relationship that is dying from excessive predictability needs novelty-enhancing strategies, in contrast to the relationship which has deteriorated to the point where its parties can no longer identify with it.

The openness–closedness dialectic

Although the strategy of open relationship talk is present in people's repertoires of maintenance/repair strategies, it is greatly outnumbered by indirect strategic options (Bell, Daly and Gonzalez, 1985; Dindia and Baxter, 1987). Further, open talk is employed relatively less frequently than these other strategies (Shea and Pearson, 1986). All of the first three developmental phases, then, are characterized by the non-dominance of openness over closedness. However, I suspect that this dialectical tension takes on a different form during this third phase in contrast to the first two phases. Openness in 'established' personal relationships may mean vulnerability just as it does in earlier phases (Noller, 1985; Shimanoff, 1985), but it also appears to be conceived as 'work', i.e. something to be employed only when needed to keep the relationship maintained. In everyday relational life, personal relationship parties apparently do not regard this particular form of 'work' as necessary, displaying instead a tendency to engage in nonverbal 'mindreading' (Gottman, 1979). The perception that open discussion is unnecessary undoubtedly is a manifestation of the perceptual overconfidence which the parties have about their knowledge of one another.

If a researcher were to monitor the day-to-day disclosure levels in personal relationships which were in different phases of development, all of the relationships would probably display limited openness. But fear of vulnerability appears to be the exclusive driving force of closedness in developmental phases 1 and 2, in contrast to the perceived absence of instrumental value in openness which is common to more established relationships.

For relationships which cannot sustain their synthesized bond, the autonomy--connection dialectic will evolve into a fourth phase of dissolution.

Phase 4: Connection to Autonomy

On the surface, this developmental phase appears to be the mere reversal of the first phase. However, contrary to the claim by Altman and Taylor (1973) that dissolution is like a movie of the relationship's growth shown in reverse, dissolution is a qualitatively different dynamic from the earlier phases (Baxter, 1987b; Duck, 1982a). This difference is evident in examining how the secondary contradictions are manifested during this phase.

The novelty–predictability dialectic

Altman, Vinsel and Brown (1981) have posited that dissolving relationships initially feature 'rapid-fire' and dramatic shifts between conflicts and attempts at repair as the parties grapple with their felt ambivalence and gradually become transformed in the attenuation of conflict and the waning of responsiveness of any sort through withdrawal. In dialectical terms, the Altman *et al.* argument posits two distinct periods within this phase: one dominated by unpredictability of action and outcome in felt ambivalence and pendular swings between conflict and repair, and the other dominated by predictability of both action and outcome in the decline of responsiveness of any kind. In general, the research appears to support this conception of dissolution.

The ambivalence experienced early in this phase concerns whether to dissolve the relationship or to attempt its repair from within (Duck, 1982a; Vaughn, 1986). Such felt ambivalence manifests itself in an increase in, or continuation of, conflict (Lloyd and Cate, 1985a). However, unlike the conflict which accompanies the ambivalence of phase 2, conflict at this point is likely to be punctuated with a declining rate of repair attempts (Lloyd and Cate, 1985a). With continuing conflict comes an attributional shift as one comes to regard the other's faults and/or irreconcilable incompatibilities between the parties as the reason for the conflicts (Cupach and Metts, 1986; Lloyd and Cate, 1985a). In turn, this attributional shift leads to a decreased likelihood of integrative, cooperative conflict management strategies and an increased likelihood of competitively based strategies (Sillars, 1981). Thus, the conflict which occurs during this stage lacks the quality of constructive novelty which characterizes phase 2 conflict; rather, the conflict of this phase produces the certainty of dissolution.

Once a relationship party has determined to exit from the relationship, strategic withdrawal occurs; the relationship is perceived now as no longer meriting even the investment of energy needed to argue. This attenuation of conflict and responsiveness implicates the openness–closedness dialectic and is discussed further below.

During the dissolution phase, both of the poles in the novelty–predictability dialectic function to undermine the bond of connection. The source of predict-

ability in this relationship phase, i.e. the increased sense that conflict is inevitable due to inherent flaws in the other party and/or in the relationship, only escalates the disengager's desire to terminate the relationship. In addition, the source of novelty or unpredictability in this phase, i.e. the substitution of ambivalence and conflict–repair cycles for the established routines, symbols, and meanings built during prior phases, also serves to undermine connection.

The openness–closedness dialectic

Relationship parties seeking dissolution convey their desire to exit in a variety of ways, but the most frequent appear to be indirect: (1) pseudo deescalation (e.g. telling the other that one 'still wants to be friends' although the secret intent is never to see the other again); (2) cost escalation, i.e. increasing the costs to the other so that he or she makes the first formal move towards break-up; and (3) indirect withdrawal through reduced frequency of contact and reduced breadth of disclosure (Baxter, 1985). Of course, if the other party persists in seeking to continue the relationship, the disengager will often resort to penultimate directness, often in the form of a confrontation in which attributional blame is cast (Baxter, 1984).

Throughout this progression of ambivalence–conflict–withdrawal, the poles of openness and closedness jointly contribute to the demise of connection. Open conflict which is destructively managed contributes to the disengager's desire to terminate the relationship. Withdrawal serves to prolong the duration of the dissolution itself, frustrating the parties all the more (Baxter, 1985). Thus, whether through openness or closedness, the relationship's demise is the result.

The openness–closedness dialectic works towards the demise of the relationship not only internally in the interaction between the relationship parties but also externally in what is and is not shared with outsiders. Unlike the role of privacy in prior developmental phases, privacy from others during this fourth phase no longer revitalizes the relationship but only serves to perpetuate the negativity bias which the parties now hold about each other. By the time the relationship's difficulties have been made public to others, it is less for external assistance in the relationship's repair and more for purposes of social support or legitimation of one's dissolution decision (Duck, 1982a; Vaughn, 1986).

The meaning of the openness–closedness dialectic is transformed during this dissolution phase. Prior constructions of the dialectic in terms of vulnerability–safety and instrumental value are supplemented by a third meaning, consummation. Although openness during dissolution may be regarded as both risky and unnecessary, it also performs a consummatory function in its public declaration of the disengager's dissatisfaction and desire to exit. The act of verbalization to the other party and/or to outsiders solidifies the relationship's demise, constituting a form of symbolic spoilage of the relationship from which recovery is exceedingly difficult (McCall, 1982).