DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 258 288 CS 504 897

AUTHOR Tolhuizen, James H.
TITLE Control and Affiliation: A Two Dimensional Approach to Relational Communication.
PUB DATE Apr 85
NOTE 37p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Central States Speech Association (Indianapolis, IN, April 4-6, 1985).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Communication Research; Communication Skills; *Interpersonal Attraction; *Interpersonal Communication; *Interpersonal Relationship; *Research Needs; Speech Communication
IDENTIFIERS *Affiliation (Social Behavior); *Control (Social Behavior)

ABSTRACT

Interpersonal behavior has been observed in a number of studies, and yet the two relational issues of control and affiliation are commonly reflected in all of them. Relational control includes such behaviors as dominance, assertiveness, retiring, and following, while relational affiliation includes involvement, acceptance, friendliness, and affection and association, and their opposites of aloofness, rejection, unfriendliness, hate, and disassociation. Although both control and affiliation are considered major organizing principles of social behavior, only relational control has been extensively investigated by researchers to date. In order to encourage research in relational affiliation, a conceptualization of affiliation that is consistent with the relational approach is needed. Conceiving of affiliation as the horizontal dimension of relationships, messages may be viewed as representing one of three types of affiliative moves: (1) an attempt to approach the person and define the relationship as closer, more involving, more friendly, and more loving; (2) an attempt to retract from the person and define the relationship as more distant, less involving, and less friendly; and (3) an attempt to remain stationary and not change the closeness or distance of the relationship. A scheme for coding affiliation from verbal interaction can then be used. (A set of 12 research propositions about relational affiliation drawn from recent communication theory and research are discussed.) (EL)

# CONTROL AND AFFILIATION: A TWO DIMENSIONAL APPROACH TO RELATIONAL COMMUNICATION

James H. Tolhuizen

Department of Speech Communication and Theater Arts
Batten Arts and Letters Building
Old Dominion University
Norfolk, Virginia 23508-8510

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Central States Speech Association, Indianapolis, Indiana, April, 1985.

# CONTROL AND AFFILIATION: A TWO DIMENSIONAL APPROACH TO RELATIONAL COMMUNICATION

## Abstract

This essay reviews studies of interpersonal behavior and concludes that control and affiliation are two salient features of relational definitions, though only relational control has been extensively investigated by researchers to date. In order to encourage research in relational affiliation, a conceptualization of affiliation that is consistent with the relational approach is discussed, and a scheme for coding affiliation from verbal interaction is developed. Finally, a set of research propositions about relational affiliation are drawn from recent communication theory and research and the potential impact of relational affiliation research on our understanding of human interaction is discussed.

The relational communication perspective has its roots in the anthropological studies of Bateson (1935; 1958) and later in the clinical work of the Palo Alto group (Bateson, Jackson, Haley & Weakland, 1956; Lederer & Jackson, 1967). The basis of this approach is that interaction serves to define the relationship between communicators. Ruesch and Bateson (1951) argue that messages contain two aspects they called the report and the command aspects (also called the content and relational aspects). The report or content component of messages refers to the information the messages carry about the objective world. The command or relational component of messages refers to the fact that messages also contain information (often implied) about the communicator's perceptions of self, the other, and the relationship between self and other. Through the process of making, accepting, rejecting and offering alternative definitional bids, relational partners negotiate relational definitions (Villard & Whipple, 1976). Relational communication research, therefore, has primarily focused on the process of negotiating relational definitions (Millar & Rogers, 1976).

Within this context, several principles form important assumptions of the relational approach. One assumption, for instance, is that the relationship is the minimal level of observation (Parks & Wilmot, 1975). This principle shifts the focus of research attention away from the properties and behaviors of individuals onto the level of the interact (act-response sequence) (Millar & Rogers, 1976). In relational communication research, messages become meaningful only when tied to the messages that precede and succeed them. Another assumption, that social behavior and communication

are synonymous, stipulates that all behavior occurring in the presence of another is significant in that it becomes a part of the relational definition (Watzlavick, et el., 1967). A final assumption is that messages are punctuated into meaningful units (Watzlavick, et el., 1967). Interaction is assumed to be continuous and without clearly marked beginnings or endings. This gives interaction an intractable quality; there simply are no intrinsic subdivisions or segments that give it structure. Therefore, it is necessary for communicators, and for researchers, to impose structure on it. This is done by arbitrarily punctuating the flow of interaction into meaningful patterns. While the punctuation of messages is a distinctly "anti-process" act, it is nevertheless a necessary part of deriving meaning from interaction (Penman, 1980).

In general, it is possible to summarize the assumptions and the aims of relational communication research by saying that it attempts to identify patterns in the interaction behavior of communicators in order to better understand the process of relational definition. This essay builds upon this focus. First, it will be argued that two dimensions, control and affiliation, are salient features of relational definitions, though only relational control has received significant research attention. Next, attention will be turned to developing a conceptualization of affiliation, and a scheme for measuring it, both of which are consistent with the relational approach. In the final section of the essay, a number of research propositions about relational affiliation will be discussed. The purpose of the essay is to encourage scholarly discussion and research in relational affiliation.

Relational Definitions: Two Dimensions

The contention that participants negotiate relational definitions through interaction leads directly to the question of how these relational definitions are constituted. Since relational definitions arise out of the behavior of participants toward one another (Wilmot, 1979), perhaps the best way to answer this question in to investigate the characteristics of interpersonal behavior. Because of the tremendous number of variables involved and their complexity, researchers interested in this problem have attempted to reduce interpersonal behavior into fewer more manageable classes or categories of behavior (Carson, 1969). Though not universally employed, factor analysis and analysis of circumplexity have been the predominant statistical methods used by researchers to identify the underlying substratum of interpersonal behavior (Carson, 1969; Schaeffer, 1961). A representative review of this research is helpful in understanding the two major dimensions of relational definitions.

An early review of factor analytic studies of communication in small groups led Carter (1954) to conclude that group behavior could be explained by reference to three dimensions called 1) individual prominence and achievement, characterized by aggressiveness, leadership, confidence, and striving for individual recognition; 2) aiding attainment of the group, characterized by behaviors that facilitate achievement of group goals; and 3) sociability, characterized by efforts to establish and maintain cordial and satisfying relationships with others. In this research, aiding attainment of the group is clearly a group task dimension, while individual prominence and achieve-

ment, and sociability seem to reflect the interpersonal dimensions called control and affiliation in this essay.

Other early research on the dimensions of interpersonal behavior included Leary's (1957) work on interpersonal reflexes and Schutz' (1966) theory of interpersonal needs. Leary (1957) fit 16 interpersonal variables to a circumplex bounded by two general bi-polar dimensions called dominance-submissive (the equivalent of control) and love-hate (the equivalent of affiliation). Within this circumplex, each specific behavior could be characterized as some combination of these two general dimensions. For example, skeptical-distrustful behavior was interpreted as a combination of submissiveness and hate while responsible-overgenerous behavior was interpreted as a combination of dominance and love. Schutz (1966) who was primarily interested in interpersonal needs and the behaviors associated with fulfilling those needs, argued for three categories of interpersonal behavior. The first, inclusion, included behaviors aimed at establishing interaction and association with others. Control, the second, included behaviors associated with decision-making, dominance, and power in relationships. Finally, affection included behaviors associated with love, liking, and personal closeness. While the control area is self-explanatory, the inclusion and affection areas equate roughly to the affiliation dimension as discussed in this essay.

The number of studies engendered by those seminal works stand as testimonials to their richness. The Borgotta studies (Borgotta, Cattrell & Mann, 1958; Borgotta, 1960; Borgotta, 1964) were an attempt to replicate and extend Carter's (1954) work with small groups. While each of the Borgotta studies

resulted in a slightly different constellation of interpersonal behavior factors, two dimensions, individual assertiveness and sociability-likability, were common in all the studies. Foa (1961) demonstrated that the dominance-submission and love-hate dimensions of Leary (1957) could be directed either inwardly toward the self or outwardly toward others to describe a pattern of acceptance-rejection of both self and other in social behavior. In their well known study, Lorr and McNair (1963) fit 9 interpersonal interaction categories to a circumplex. Factor analysis of the scales representing these categories revealed three factors. The first was defined by dominance-competitiveness, hostility, independence, and suspicion; the second by intropunitiveness, passive-dependency, and abrasiveness; the third was defined by affiliation, nurturance, sociability, and absence of hostility and suspicion. Finally, Roger Brown (1965) described two dimensions he argued could be found in all social behavior. The first, called status, was described as a "vertical hierarchy" reflecting elements of dominance-submission, repute, and presumed personal worth. The second, called solidarity, was described as a "horizontal hierarchy" reflecting friendship, esteem, and affection.

While the researchers cited above were interested in the dimensions of interpersonal behavior in general, other researchers were investigating the dimensions of parent-child interactions. In one study, Schaeffer (1961) fit maternal behavior to a circumplex defined by two major axes called autonomy versus control, and love versus hostility. In a subsequent study in which 7th grade students rated parental behavior, three dimensions called acceptance versus rejection, psychological autonomy versus psychological control,

and firm control versus lax control were identified (Schaeffer, 1965). Another series of studies by Becker and his associates (Becker, Petersen, Luria, Shoemaker, & Hellman, 1962; Becker, 1964; Becker & Krug, 1962) revealed two dimensions of parental behavior which remained constant in all of their studies. These dimensions were warmth versus hostility and permissiveness versus restrictiveness. Again, the control and affiliation dimensions seem apparent in each of these studies of parent-child interaction.

In recent years, interest in the dimensions of interpersonal behavior has remained strong. Shostrum and Kavanaugh (1971) used two dimensions they called weakness-strength and anger-love to explain communication in a number different types of relationships. Benjamin (1974) tested and found support for a series of circumplex models based on the dominance-submissive, love-hate dimensions of Leary (1957). An interesting point about this research was that ratings of interpersonal behavior were taken from a number of different relational perspectives (i.e., mother, father, child, significant other, etc.). Wish, Deutsch, & Kaplan (1976) submitted subject's ratings of behavior in 25 relational types to individual differences multidimensional scaling. Their results yielded 4 dimensions called cooperative-friendly versus competitive-hostile, equal versus unequal, intense versus superficial, and socio-emotional and informal versus task oriented and formal. Finally, Bochner, Kaminsky, & Fitzpatrick (1977) analyzed self ratings and ratings of a "best liked other" on the Interpersonal Behavior Inventory (Lorr & McNair, 1963). Factors best describing self ratings were control, nurturance, dependency, detachment-affiliation, deference, mistrust, submissiveness, recognition,

abasement, and sociability. Factors best describing the ratings of best liked other were control, sociability, inferiority, nurturance, affiliation-detachment, mistrust, exhibition, and inhibition. Five factors, control, nurturance, detachment-affiliation, mistrust, and sociability were common to both self and best liked other ratings. These factors were shown to approximate a circumplexual order.

The studies cited above are remarkable for the consistency of their results. Interpersonal behavior in a number of relational types has been observed in a number of different ways, from a number of different perspectives, and in a number of different settings, and yet the two relational issues of control and affiliation seem to be commonly reflected in all these studies (Carson, 1965). The issue of relational control seems to include such behaviors as dominance, assertiveness, leading, influencing and their opposites submissiveness, unassertiveness, retiring, and following. The issue of relational affiliation seems to include such behaviors as involvement, acceptance, friendliness, affection, and association and their opposites aloofness, rejection, unfriendliness, hate, and disassociation. While dimensions other than control and affiliation appear in these studies, they do not appear as consistently; indeed, they seem to arise and fade depending upon the particular problem and the particular relationships of interest to the researcher (i.e., a task or goal attainment dimension often appears in studies of decision-making groups). The frequency and the clarity with which the control and affiliation appear in these studies suggests Brown (1965) was correct when he called them "major organizing principles of social behavior." Indeed, control

and affiliation appear to act as anchor points from which participants perceive their relationships with one another.

## Conceptualizing Relational Control and Affiliation

Researchers have given relational control a number of different treatments (Mark, 1971; Ericson & Rogers, 1973, 1973; Rogers & Farace, 1975; Ellis, 1976). These treatments conceptualize relational control as a vertical dimension and coding schemes based on an "upness-downess" metaphor are used to code messages as moves to structure the relationship (dominant, domineering), or to concede to the relational structuring offered by the other (submissive) (Cline, 1982). Thus according to these coding schemes a message might be coded as a "one-up" (↑), an attempt to make a definitional assertion; a "one-down" (↓), the acceptance of the other's definitional assertion or a request for the other to make a definitional assertion; or a "one across" (→), a message that neither makes a definitional assertion nor accepts the other's definitional assertion (Parks, 1977). Once acts are assigned one of these three control directions, interaction level data is derived by combining the control direction indicators of adjacent messages. Thus interactions may be designated as one of six possible types called competitive symmetry (↑↑); submissive symmetry (↓↓); neutralized symmetry (→→); complementary (↑↓,↓↑); transitory-submissive (↓→,→↓) and transitory-dominant (↑→,→↑) (Parks, Farace, Rogers, Albrect, & Abbott, 1976). Research using these schemes has investigated control patterns in the communication in groups (Ellis 1976; 1977) and in the communication between husbands and wives (Parks, 1977).

While the relational control dimension has attracted a considerable amount of research effort, the relational affiliation dimension has received very little attention; a fact that may be partly due to the paradigmatic nature of relational communication research. The theoretical work of the Palo Alto group is insistent in pointing out the importance of symmetrical and complementary interaction patterns in defining relationship, and in describing these as representing patterns of power, control, and one-upness/one-downess (Haley, 1958; 1963; Jackson, Riskin, & Satir, 1961; Watzlavick, 1964; Watzlavick, et el., 1967). In light of this conceptual background, it is little wonder that research in relational control should emerge first.

An adequate conception of relational affiliation requires a complete shift away from the upness/downess metaphor of relational control. Cline (1982), following the suggestion of Brown (1965), has argued that affiliation is best described as the horizontal dimension of relationships and suggests that the metaphors of close-distant and approach-retract (avoid) be used to describe it. Based upon this conception, messages might be viewed as representing one of three types of affiliative moves: 1) an attempt to move toward or approach the other and define the relationship as closer, more involving, more friendly, and more loving; 2) an attempt to move away or retract from the other and define the relationship as more distant, less involving, less friendly, and less loving; and 3) an attempt to remain stationary and not change the relative closeness or distance of the relationship. Furthermore, the approach-retract metaphors are consistent with reinforcement models of both affiliation tendency (Mehrabian & Ksionky, 1974) and interpersonal att-

raction (Byrne & Clore, 1970; Byrne, 1971; Lott & Lott, 1974). In essence, exposure to another results in experiences that are either rewarding or punishing; or perhaps more realistically, both rewarding and punishing. Because of the reinforcement values of these experiences, there is a tendency to approach or to increase contact with people who are perceived to be rewarding and avoid or decrease contact with people who are perceived to be punishing (Baron & Byrne, 1976). Thus, affiliation behavior as conceived here is a manifestation of generalized approach-avoidance preferences (Premack, 1965).

## Toward a Measure of Relational Affiliation

A measure of relational control must do two things: 1) it must stipulate the means by which messages can be assigned an affiliative value (approach, retract, or stationary), and 2) it must provide for interaction level data. The measure outlined in this section is presented with two caveats. First, the measure is speculative in that it in meant as an example of what a measure of relational affiliation might look like and how it might work. Second, with only minor exceptions, the measure codes only verbal behavior, a problem that also plagues measures of relational control (Parks, 1977). The problem, of course, is inherent in the technology of categorical coding schemes. Nominal categories produce a digital coding process that works relatively well with verbal messages, but tends to distort nonverbal behavior and to rob it of its analogic richness. Since a great amount of relational information is assumed to be communicated in this way (Watzlavick, et el, 1967), a high priority should be put on developing systems for coding control and affiliation from

nonverbal behavior.

The categories for coding relational affiliation are presented in Figure 1. Like relational control coding schemes, this system employs a

Figure 1 about here

double set of categories. The first of these is called the message form code. All verbal messages are coded into one of three message form categories which are defined as:

1. Silence/Minimal Response - Silence of 3 or more seconds duration at a transitional-relevant place or a minimal response ("yeah," "humm," "uh-huh," etc.) at a transition-relevant place.

Conversational participants are obliged to work together to sustain interaction and avoid pauses and gaps (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1978; Wieman, 1977). Silence and minimal responses violate this obligation because they are not sequentially implicative; that is they do not imply a response and therefore do little to help the other choose correct behavior (Jefferson, 1978). Because these responses amount to a refusal by one partner to participate fully with the other in constructing the conversation, they constitute a powerful sign that the person making the response is unwilling or unable to become involved with the other in the communication. Therefore, silence and minimal response always take the value of an affiliative retraction.

2. Inconsistent Messages - A response that communicates two seemingly opposite evaluations of the other or his or her message, usually through

an inconsistency between verbal content and vocal delivery.

Many theorists seem to suggest that inconsistent messages are always detrimental and even pathologic (Haley, 1963; Weakland, 1961). In the present coding system, however, these messages are viewed as having either positive or negative affiliative values. Sarcasm, a type of inconsistent message in which the verbal message has a positive evaluation while the expressive presentation implies a negative one, clearly has a negative affiliative value (Mehrabian, 1971). However, inconsistent messages can just as easily be used as expressions of involvement and affection. Hopper, Knapp, and Scott (1981), for instance, have shown that teasing insults and confrontations are important in allowing partners to comment on bothersome behaviors and habits of the other without threatening the equilibrium of the relationship. Mehrabian (1971) gives the example of a woman who says "I hate you" with a loving expression to her husband when he brings a new puppy home unannounced. "Although her words convey her dismay over the prospect of housebreaking, muddy paw prints, and desecrated flowerbeds, her soft laugh and the warmth of her voice tells him that he has in no way forfeited her love and approval (Mehrabian, 1971). The affiliative value of inconsistent messages, therefore, depend upon the evaluation implied by the expressive presentation.

3. Other - All messages that are not coded into the first two message form categories are coded as other. The affiliative value of these messages depend upon their response form codes.

The second set of categories is called the response form code and are based on the manner in which each message responds to the message that

preceded it. Response form codes are defined as:

1. Similarity/Agreement - B responds to A's message by showing agreement with or positively evaluating A's message, or by indicating shared experiences, background, or perspectives. (ex. "That's right," "I know what you mean," "I see it essentially the same way you do...," etc.).
2. Dissimilarity/Disagreement - B responds to A's message by showing disagreement with, or negatively evaluating A's message, or by indicating that he or she does not share A's experiences, background, or perspectives. (ex. "That's just not right," "Not me," "Well, I guess we just see it differently...," etc.).

Perhaps the best known and most thoroughly researched aspect of interpersonal attraction is the homophily-attraction relationship (Bersheid & Walster, 1978). Based on the rationale that similarity is reinforcing and dissimilarity is threatening, this research has generally shown that people tend to be more attracted to others who have similar backgrounds, experiences, feelings, and attitudes on a wide range of topics (Byrne, 1971). Thus a message that communicates similarity and/or agreement with the other takes the affiliative value of approach, while messages that communicate dissimilarity and/or disagreement take the retract affiliative value.

3. Acceptance - B responds to A's message by expressing a positive evaluation of some property or characteristic of A, or by expressing positive affect toward A. (ex. "You have a wonderful mind," "I really love your blue eyes," "I love you,...," etc.).

4. Rejection - B responds to A's message by expressing a negative evaluation of some property or characteristic of A, or by expressing negative affect toward A. (ex. "I can't believe how stupid you are." "I don't like the way you look at me." "I hate you...," etc.).

The "reciprocity-of-liking rule" simply states that people tend to like others who like them, and that people they like have similar feeling for them (Berscheid & Walster, 1978). While research has generally supported this position (Backman & Secord, 1959; Newcomb, 1961; Mettee & Aronson, 1974), common experience tells us that our affections are not always requited. Nevertheless, this research does show that expressions of positive evaluation and affection toward the other constitute an attempt to define a closer relationship while expressions of negative evaluation and affect are attempts to define a more distant relationship.

5. Clarification - B responds to A's message by summarizing what was understood, or by making inquiries designed to check the accuracy of understanding or to elicit additional information.

Client-centered approaches to psychotherapy emphasize active listening and accurate understanding of the other in developing and sustaining positive relationships (Rogers, 1961). Verbal clarifying behaviors include restating and paraphrasing the other's message, and questions and probes that request or encourage the other to elaborate and give more information. Attempts to fully understand the other by these means imply acceptance and a positive orientation toward the other (Rogers, 1961), and thus may be viewed as a bid to make the relationship closer.

6. Personalized Content - B responds to A's message with statements directly referencing self-feelings, experiences, and information (self-disclosure).

Self-disclosure is a type of communication message in which "one person voluntarily tells another person things about himself which the other is unlikely to know or discover from another source" (Pearce & Sharp, 1973, 414). As such, self-disclosure is associated with increased information exchange (Berger & Bradac, 1982) and increased intimacy (Gilbert, 1975; Knapp, 1984). Self-disclosing communication, therefore, constitutes a bid for a closer and more personal relationship.

7. Impersonal Content Switch - B responds to A's message by switching the focus of talk to topics of less personalness, or by switching the intensity of pronoun usage.

Gilbert (1976) hypothesized a curvilinear relationship between self-disclosure and relational satisfaction. Her rationale was that self-disclosure facilitates intimacy and satisfaction up to the point where anxiety over the personalness of information exchange outweighs the perceived rewards of increased intimacy. A person who is uncomfortable with the personalness of his or her partner's message may wish to reduce the intimacy of exchange in one of two ways; he or she may respond by switching to a less personal topic, or by switching the intensity of the exchange by changing immediacy levels (e.g., change "I" to "you", "this" to "that", "we" to "they", etc.) (Weiner & Mehrabian, 1968). This kind of switch is an attempt to depersonalize the relationship and would take the affiliative value of retraction.

8. Assistance - B responds to A's message by giving or requesting help, advice, assistance, reassurance, etc.

A common belief among many people is that close relational partners should be able to depend on one another for help and assistance. Philips and Metzger's (1976) study of friendship showed that refusals to render aid to a friend in a crisis often did irreparable damage to the relationship while receiving unexpected aid from an acquaintance was instrumental in making that person a friend. Davis (1973) discusses two types of favors intimates perform for one another. The first type are physical favors that aid the helpee in procuring desired things from his or her environment (this could be as simple as asking for a glass of water, or as significant as a loan of a substantial sum of money, or using one's "contacts" to help obtain employment). Psychological favors help revitalize the helpee's psychological strength through listening to his or her problems, giving reassurance and advice, and giving emotional support. Asking for, or giving these types of assistance is an attempt to personalize the relationship.

9. Disqualification - B's response is discrepant or incongruent with A's message in that it is irrelevant, tangential, indicates imperviousness, or otherwise fails to extend the normal flow and sequence of talk. Sudden topic changes and failure to observe the normal cooperative rules of conversation are included here.

Topic control has been shown to be an important component of interaction management behavior (Argyle, 1969; Wieman, 1977). While communicators may have their own personal goals and plans for interaction, they are nevertheless

expected to respond appropriately to the topic and context of the other's messages. According to Cissna and Sieburg (1981) there are at least three ways of violating this expectation and thereby disqualifying the other's message. A disjuctive response in one that fails to preserve continuity of content with the previous message. Suddenly switching topics for no apparent reason and with no warning would be disjuctive. A tangential response is one that superficially acknowledges the other's message but switches direction instead of responding to it (ex. "I can see that's a problem, but that reminds me..."). Finally, an impervious response in one that implies lack of awareness of, or distorts or denies the perceptions and feelings of the other as stated in his or her message (ex., "Well I just know you don't really feel that way.") These responses imply an unwillingness to accept the other and to become involved with them.

0. Other - Any interact that cannot be coded into any of the nine preceding categories is coded as other.

After each communication message has been assigned a two-digit number code, the codes are then used to assign one of the three affiliation values of approach, retract, or stationary to each message. Since there are three message form codes and ten message response codes, there are 30 possible affiliative message types. Figure 2 presents a key for assigning affiliation values to each of the message types. Since the rationale and research for these ass-

Figure 2 about here

ignments were discussed above, they will not be reviewed here. Once each message has been assigned an affiliative value, interaction level data may be derived by coupling the affiliation value of each adjacent message pair (1-2,2-3,3-4,4-5, etc.). This process produces seven possible affiliative interaction types which are defined as:

1. Symmetrical Approach (AA) - An approach message from one person is followed by an approach message by the other person resulting in mutually increased affiliation.
2. Symmetrical Retraction (RR) - A retract message from one person is followed by a retract message from the other resulting in mutually decreased affiliation.
3. Symmetrical Stationary (SS) - A stationary message from one person is followed by a stationary message from the other resulting in mutually unchanged affiliation.
4. Escape Complementary (AR) - An approach message by one person is followed by a retract message from the other. This sequence amounts to a denial of an offer for increased affiliation (He: "You know I care for you very much." She: "Oh, Bill, can't we just remain friends and have fun together?").
5. Pursuit Complementary (RA) - A retract message by one person is followed by an approach message from the other. This sequence amounts to a refusal to accept decreased affiliation (She: "Bill, I don't think we should see each other anymore." He: "But Hilda, we can't break up now, we're so right for each other.").

6. Unilateral Approach (SA,AS) - The coupling of an approach and a stationary message. Intuitively, this type of interact seems to be a little like walking toward a stationary object such as a building. As the person moves toward the building, he or she gets closer to it even though the building does not come to meet them. Whether this type of interact actually results in increased affiliation, however, is a matter of conjecture. Certainly one might stand still waiting for the other to make the first move. Just as probable, though, is the possibility that this type of interact may reflect indecision on the part of the stationary partner, or may even be an attempt to deny closer affiliation without hurting the other or destroying the relationship. In any case, the exact meaning of this type of interact is not immediately apparent.

7. Unilateral Retraction (RS,SR) - The coupling of a retract message and a stationary message. This type of interact seems to be simply the reverse of the type above and, like the previous type, its meaning is not immediately clear.

One observation about symmetrical and complementary interactions is clear at this point. Symmetrical control interactions (↑↑,↓↓) are indicative of a struggle, perhaps even disagreement between relational partners, while complementary control patterns (↑↓,↓↑) reflect acceptance and agreement (Parks, 1977). On the issue of affiliation, however, these patterns would seem to be reversed. Symmetrical affiliation patterns (AA,RR,SS) appear to indicate relational agreement, and complementary affiliation patterns (AR,RA) appear to reflect disagreement. This interpretation is consistent with Schutz' (1966)

contention that people generally want behavior in the inclusion and affection areas to be marked by similarity, and behavior in the control area to be marked by difference.

## Research Propositions about Relational Affiliation

To be useful, the concept of relational affiliation must lead to a line of research that ultimately produces a better understanding of the communication between relational partners. The propositions listed below are based on recent theory and research results, and represent a best guess about how these results apply to relational affiliation. The list is certainly not exhaustive nor is meant to imply that the appearance of a proposition on this list makes it somehow more important or worthy of research attention than other unstated propositions. The propositions are listed here solely for the purpose of demonstrating the types of questions researchers might address in their attempts to explore and test relational affiliation as conceptualized in previous sections of this paper.

1. Mutual interpersonal attraction and liking will be positively related to symmetrical approach and negatively related to symmetrical retraction patterns.

As alluded to earlier, the notion of reinforcement is central to the present conceptualization of relational affiliation. Research has generally shown that people are more attracted to others whom they perceive to be positively reinforcing, and less attracted to those whom they perceive to be negatively reinforcing (Byrne, 1971). In essence, the first proposition assumes that approach and retraction are one means by which participants communicate

positive and negative evaluations of one another.

2. Early stages of initial interactions will be characterized by symmetrical approach interactions.

The "reciprocity rule" states that information exchange rates in interpersonal relationships should be roughly equal (Gouldner, 1960). While eventual reciprocity is to be expected in on-going relationships, in initial interactions, the expectation is for reciprocity of information exchange within the encounter (Wilnot, 1979). Berger and Calabrese (1975) have argued that this "tit for tat" reciprocity is the result of high levels of uncertainty in initial interactions and the need to prevent either party from gaining "information power" over the other. Symmetrical approach interaction patterns should be indicative of this reciprocal exchange of information in initial interactions.

3. The more frequent the symmetrical approach interactions, the greater will be the expressed mutual satisfaction with the relationship.

4. The more frequent the symmetrical retraction interactions, the greater will be the expressed mutual dissatisfaction with the relationship.

Satisfaction in interpersonal relationships is an issue fundamentally tied to interpersonal perceptions (Laing, Phillipson & Lee, 1966). According to McCall (1970; 1976; McCall & Simmons, 1966), relational participants choose one or more of their role identities which they present to the other as a self-definition. In interaction, these self-definitions are confirmed or denied and personal identities are negotiated as each partner attempts to adjust his or her self-presentations to those of the other. Satisfaction with the relationship is dependent upon the extent to which each participant is

able to support or confirm the other's self-view (McCall & Simmons, 1966). Symmetrical approach and symmetrical retraction, respectively, are the means by which support or nonsupport of these identities are communicated.

5. Interpersonal trust will be positively related to symmetrical approach and negatively related to symmetrical retraction interactions.

A distinction can be made between trusting behavior, an act that increases the risk and vulnerability of one person toward another, and the cognitive state of trust, the belief that the other will respond in ways that assure positive rather than negative outcomes (Pearce, 1974). Simply put, when risk-taking behavior is responded to positively a cognitive state of trust develops, and when it is responded to negatively, the cognitive state of trust is destroyed. Therefore, symmetrical approach interactions should be associated with increased cognitive trust since these behaviors imply mutually positive responses of partners to one another. Likewise, since symmetrical retraction interactions imply mutually negative responses, these behaviors should be associated with decreased levels of cognitive trust.

6. The frequency of symmetrical approach interactions will be positively related to continued relational development and negatively related to relational dissolution.

7. The frequency of symmetrical retraction interactions will be negatively related to continued relational development and positively related to relational dissolution.

A number of researchers have discussed stages of relational development and dissolution (Thibut & Kelley, 1959; Levenger & Snoek, 1972; Murstein,

1977; Knapp, 1984). Each of these systems is based on the assumption that as relationships change, information exchange in the relationship is also transformed. For example, Altman and Taylor's (1973) social penetration process, which is typical of these approaches, views information exchange as moving from peripheral areas of self to more central core areas as relationships develop, and then back to more peripheral areas as relationships dissolve. Trust, as discussed above, is an important element in this process. As trust develops, partners can take greater risks and reveal more central core areas of self and, conversely, when trust is destroyed, communication becomes increasingly circumscribed (Knapp, 1984). Thus, symmetrical approach interactions, because they facilitate trust, should characterize developing relationships and symmetrical retraction interactions, because they lower trust, should characterize dissolving relationships.

8. The more frequent the symmetrical interactions, the greater will be the expressed certainty about the relationship.

9. The more frequent the complementary interactions, the greater will be the expressed uncertainty about the relationship.

Uncertainty in interpersonal relationships involves at least two things: 1) the ability to retrospectively explain the other's behavior, and 2) the ability to predict the other's future behavior (Berger & Bradac, 1983). In short, when the other's behavior is unexpected or unexplainable, uncertainty increases. In so far as symmetrical interactions follow the rule of reciprocity and reflect agreement between relational partners over the issues of closeness and involvement, these patterns should be associated with increased

levels of certainty. On the other hand, in so far as complementary interactions reflect disagreement on these same issues, they should make it more difficult to explain and predict their partner's behavior.

10. The more frequent the complementary interactions, the more mindful the participants will be of the relationship and of their own behavior.

According to Langer (1978; Langer, Blank, & Chanowitz, 1978) much of social interaction is mindless; that is, it is routine and can be carried out with only minimal conscious thought. Furthermore, Langer (1978) argues that social behaviors become thoughtful only when the situation or the responses of others' are novel, unexpected, or difficult to interpret. Therefore, complementary interactions, which increase uncertainty and force the participants to face the possibility that they do not share a common view of the relationship, should increase the level of mindfulness in the participants' behavior.

11. The more frequent the complementary interactions, the more frequent will be the use of knowledge acquisition strategies.

Besides prompting participants to think about and plan their interactions more carefully, complementary interactions should also prompt the participants to seek out new information about their partner in an attempt to reduce the level of uncertainty. According to Berger and Bradac (1983) there are three classes of knowledge acquisition strategies. Passive strategies involve casual observations of the other. Active strategies involve getting information from people who know the other or setting up situations in which to observe the other. Finally, interactive strategies such as interrogation and self-disclosure require direct communication with the other. While the choice of which

strategy to use may be influenced by such conditions as the level of relationship development and relationship type, the need to aquire information about the other should increase during periods of more frequent complementary interaction.

12. The greater the status difference between the relational partners, the more frequent will be unilateral interactions.

Henley's (1977) summary of nonverbal communication, sex, and power showed that persons in superior status positions used more friendly and intimate behaviors toward subordinate status persons than the subordinate status persons used toward them. Brown (1965) also showed that the verbal greetings superiors directed toward subordinates were less formal and more friendly than the greetings they received from their subordinates. In essence, this research shows that persons in higher status and power positions can approach lower status persons more closely than the other way around. In the language of relational affiliation, this should result in more frequent unilateral interactions.

## Summary and Conclusion

In the give and take of communication, participants continually jockey for acceptable and satisfying relational positions. Thus, metaphorically, communicators are in constant relational motion relative to one another. A review of interpersonal behavior studies indicated two universal dimensions called control and affiliation along which this relational dance takes place. Up to the present time, communication researchers have focused almost exclusively on the relational control dimension. In the interest of promoting

research in relational affiliation, the bulk of this essay has focused on this second relational dimension. It is argued that based upon the expected reinforcement values of message responses, it is possible to code verbal messages as attempts to increase the involvement and personalness of the relationship (approach), to decrease the involvement and personalness of the relationship (retract), or to not change the involvement and personalness of the relationship (stationary). It is important to note that within this conceptualization, it is not important whether a message is actually perceived to be positively or negatively reinforcing by the recipient, it is only important that the message itself represent a bid for increased or decreased affiliation. As a relational construct, it is the response of the recipient that determines the effect of the affiliative bid on the relationship.

From the standpoint of the communicator who wishes to become more successful in his or her communication encounters, and from the standpoint of the researcher who hopes to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the process, communication can often be a puzzling experience. Research on relational control has begun to help fit some of the pieces of the puzzle together. Nevertheless, the picture remains incomplete and research on relational affiliation may help to complete it. Furthermore, control and affiliation occur coetaneously in interaction and investigations of the two dimensions simultaneously could lead to an understanding of how they work together that may yield an entirely new level of relational knowledge. This task, of course, remains for the future. The task for the present is to take the first steps toward validating a reliable measure of relational affiliation.

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Figure 1

Coding Categories for

Relational Affiliation

| Message Form Codes | Response Form Codes |
|---|---|
| 1. Silence/Minimal Response | 1. Similarity/Agreement |
| 2. Inconsistent Messages | 2. Dissimilarity/Disagreement |
| 3. Other | 3. Acceptance |
| | 4. Rejection |
| | 5. Clarification |
| | 6. Personalized Content |
| | 7. Impersonal Content Switch |
| | 8. Assistance |
| | 9. Disqualification |
| | 0. Other |

Figure 2

Key for Assigning

Affiliation Values

| Response Form Codes | Message Form Codes: Silence/Minimal Response | Inconsistent Messages | Other |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Similarity/Agreement | R | R | A |
| 2. Dissimilarity/Disagreement | R | A | R |
| 3. Acceptance | R | R | A |
| 4. Rejection | R | A | R |
| 5. Clarification | R | R | A |
| 6. Personalized Content | R | R | A |
| 7. Impersonal Content Switch | R | R | R |
| 8. Assistance | R | R | R |
| 9. Disqualification | R | R | R |
| 0. Other | R | S | S |

A = Approach

R = Retract

S = Stationary