

## Advances in Personal Relationships

### Communicating Affection

Few behavioral processes are more central to the development and maintenance of intimate relationships than the communication of affection. Indeed, affectionate expressions often initiate and accelerate relational development. By contrast, their absence in established relationships frequently coincides with relational deterioration. This text explores the scientific research on affection exchange to emerge from the disciplines of communication, social psychology, family studies, psychophysiology, anthropology, and nursing. Specific foci include the individual and relational benefits (including health benefits) of affectionate behavior, as well as the significant risks often associated with expressing affection. A new, comprehensive theory of human affection exchange is offered, and its merits relative to existing theories are explored.

Kory Floyd is associate professor and director of graduate M.A. studies in the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication at Arizona State University. He holds a Ph.D. in communication from the University of Arizona (1998), an M.A. in speech communication from the University of Washington (1994), and a B.A. in English literature from Western Washington University (1991). He has authored or coauthored four other books and more than 60 journal articles and book chapters on topics related to affectionate communication, nonverbal behavior, and family relationships. In addition, he is currently editor of *Journal of Family Communication* and has been an associate editor of *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*. He has earned a number of awards for his research, including the New Scholar of the Year award from the International Network on Personal Relationships.

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**Interpersonal Behavior and Social Context**

KORY FLOYD

*Arizona State University*



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This book is dedicated to my Master's degree advisor,  
Mac Parks.

For turning me on to communication research,  
for teaching me the value of a good idea,  
and for being the kind of mentor that I myself strive to be,  
I will always be most grateful.

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## Foreword

Talk not of wasted affection; affection never was wasted.

– Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

In virtually every typology of fundamental human needs, one finds mention of affection. Humans don't just *love* to be loved; we *need* to be loved. And, perhaps equally as important, we need to be *shown* that we are loved. This latter need, and the processes by which we meet it, are the focus of this text.

The communication of affection – the process of expressing our care, appreciation, value, and love for others – is so ingrained a part of the human social experience that it is fairly easy to overlook. We communicate affection to friends when they are feeling low, as a means of providing comfort and emotional support. We express affection to our children as a way of making them feel loved, cared for, and protected. We convey affection to potential romantic partners in order to signal our attraction, and to current romantic partners as a means of reinforcing the strength of our pair bonds. We can even behave affectionately toward people for whom we have no genuine feelings of affection, as a way to manipulate their behaviors, attitudes, or emotions. Affectionate communication is a ubiquitous aspect of human relational interaction – its presence can be the source of unparalleled joy; its absence can be the cause of pain and distress.

The question of why affectionate communication serves so many important functions in the human relational experience has been an intriguing one to me for more than a decade. In this text, I address a number of aspects of affectionate communication, including how affectionate messages are encoded and decoded, how we respond to them, what benefits they bring us, and what risks they expose us to. I have cast

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FOREWORD

a wide net in this book by including research focusing on a number of populations and published in a number of disciplines. My aim in doing so is both to pull knowledge and insight from related areas of study and to spur new questions, new theories, and new empirical studies on the process of expressing affection.

My own research on affectionate communication began in 1995 with a diary study of platonic friends' affection behaviors over a 2-week period. Since that time, I have conducted multiple laboratory experiments, field experiments, and surveys focusing on how people express affection, how they respond to affectionate behaviors, how they evaluate the appropriateness of affection exchanges, and how these outcomes are influenced by characteristics of individuals, relationships, and situations. The sum of these efforts is a collective body of data involving more than 8,000 people, ranging in age from 12 to 96 years. They represent multiple ethnic backgrounds, socioeconomic ranks, relational experiences, and levels of education. Although my data come largely from Americans, I have sampled from every geographic area of the country. Obviously, no sample can capture all of the forms of human diversity that might affect the behaviors we seek to understand. This is why integrative reviews, such as the ones offered in this book, are important, as they draw on the strengths of multiple samples collected from a range of populations and with a variety of methods.

The profound joy of discovery I have enjoyed in the process of studying affectionate communication has been greatly enhanced with the help and input of several coauthors with whom I have had the privilege of working on this research over the years. Many sincere thanks to Judee Burgoon, Kristin Davis, Mark Di Corsia, Larry Erbert, Lisa Farinelli, Kelby Halone, Jon Hess, Colin Hesse, Jeff Judd, Angie La Valley, Lisa Miczo, Alan Mikkelson, Mac Parks, Mary Claire Morr Serewicz, George Ray, Jack Sargent, Melissa Tafoya, Kyle Tusing, Mike Voloudakis, Jason Wilson, Christina Yoshimura, and especially to my most frequent collaborator, Mark Morman. Each of these scholars and friends has made the process of learning about affectionate communication all the more rich and colorful.