



Relational Dialectics Theory

Baxter and Montgomery



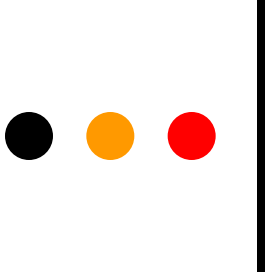
Relational Dialectics Theory

- Partners in a relationship experience ongoing tensions between contradictory impulses.
- People can become comfortable in believing inconsistent things about the relationships in which they are involved.
- The dialectical approach is characterized by framing contradictions as “both/and”



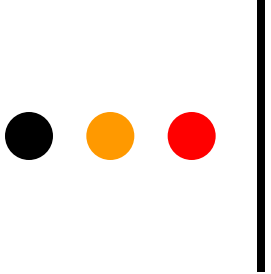
Focus

- o Dialectical tension in relationships



Relationships are not linear.

- 1. Relationships swing back and forth between contradictory desires held by one or both partners.
- 2. Baxter and Montgomery reject the use of the term development to characterize relationships due to the assumption associated with the term as being linear.
- 3. They prefer to view relationships in terms of "complexity," as opposed to labeling them with regard to their "progress."



Contradiction is fundamental to relational life.

- 1. The "pushes" and "pulls" of the tensions in relational life are ongoing.
- 2. Communication is the primary tool that partners use to manage these tensions.



Elements of dialectics

- **Totality** - people in a relationship are interdependent and interrelated
- **Contradiction** - the oppositions that are experienced in relationships
- **Motion** - changing nature of relationships over time
- **Praxis** - humans are rational decision makers that make choices



Autonomy and Connection

- simultaneous desires to maintain our independence and to fulfill our need for affiliation and inclusion.



Openness and protection

- We have conflicting desires to be open and reveal personal information to our relational partner but to maintain a sense of privacy by keeping some information to ourselves.

six ways married couples manage this tension (Hoppe-Nagao & Ting-Toomey, 2002)

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Novelty and predictability

- We have conflicting desires to experience the comfort of stability and the excitement of change in relationships.

This distinguishes RDT from other theories such as Uncertainty Reduction Theory



Contextual dialectics

- the tensions resulting from the place of the relationship within the culture.
- Rawlins identifies two contextual dialectics.
 - 1. Public and private
 - 2. The real and the ideal



Four strategies to manage dialectical tensions.

- Cyclic alternation - Siblings may favor autonomy in their teen years but seek closeness in their adult relationships.
- Segmentation - A married couple who own and operate a business together might stress predictability in the workplace but novelty when they are together at home.



Strategies

- Selection - Partners who choose to be close at all times, doing all activities together, are ignoring their need for autonomy.
- Integration - arriving at a compromise between the opposing tensions or a "happy medium"