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Family Relationships: Communicating a Concept*

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"Family relationships," a term appearing throughout professional literature, carries meanings which range widely from the specific "interaction" or "process" to the general "association." If more consistently defined, it might serve as a useful concept within several frameworks of family theory. Implications for communicating the relationships concept through teaching or counseling are indicated. The total relationship provides a perspective for diagnosing and solving problems in various areas of family life. Pre-professional education is needed to help teachers or counselors to be themselves, to use their own personalities in effective relating. Commitments of individuals to expanding circles of interpersonal relationships is called for.

This paper has died a thousand deaths in the process of a bearing. To begin with, its conception was complicated by the fact that there were many parents. What at first seemed to us a pregnant idea appeared at times to be leading to false labor or perhaps a miscarriage. And now that the time of delivery is at hand, we are still beset with uncertainty except for one fact. There is more to be known about relationships than we know or even had suspected. One text for these ideas comes from the NCFR annual meeting last year. In her paper, "The Family in a Cybercultural Era," Alice Mary Hilton observed:

If machines take on the chores of housekeeping and providing, we have the prerequisite for a more meaningful and beautiful relationship between husband and wife than any that has ever been possible in the age of scarcity. It would be a more demanding and more difficult relationship than anything we know now.1

What does she mean: "a meaningful" or "beautiful" relationship or a "more demanding" and "more difficult" relationship?

And farther back than that, questions have been asked as to whether the marriage texts were realistic in implying that "sex" or "money" or "in-laws" were problems. Are not all of these merely areas in which decisions are made—decisions about relationships? And is it not more realistic to work with the student, parent, or teacher in focussing on relationships? What constitutes growing, creative, free-re-

* This paper is an adaptation of the presidential address delivered to the Annual Meeting of the National Council on Family Relations in San Francisco, August 18, 1967.
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associated with it, some of the closely related concepts? What are some implications which appear appropriate for the practitioner who might focus on family relationships?

**Family Relationships: Need for Analysis**

The term "family relationships" or "family relations" has run through the literature of the family field for many years. A quarter of a century ago, the book *Family Relationships* by Ada Hart Arlitt appeared and was followed shortly in 1944 by *Marriage and Family Relationships*, written by Foster. In 1953 came *Readings on Marriage and Family Relations* by Olsen, Mudde, and Bourdeau; in 1959, *Marriage and Family Relations* by Bee; and in 1966, *Foundations for Marriage and Family Relations* by Womble.

Numerous colleges list departments of child development and family relationships (or family relations), and this is one of the subject matter sections of the American Home Economics Association. For almost 30 years the National Council on Family Relations has been operative. Unless one reads what has been written on the topic, it might be assumed that "everybody" knows what is meant by "family relationships" just as everyone knows what is meant by marriage. But seldom in the texts or in articles using the words is it specified what is meant. Foster writes of "the meaning of words" but does not include the words used as the title of his text. Arlitt wrote: "All families are the result of reactions of individuals to each other and reactions of these individuals to the community, both individually and as a family group."*

Common usage would appear to follow the Webster definition of "relations" as "connections" or "particular ways of being related or associated." Thus "family relations," with the term "relationships" used synonymously, refers to particular ways of being related in the family. But professional usage of the term attaches to the definition more elements than the static-sounding "association" or "connection."

In the final paragraph of his chapter on "The Situational Approach" in the Nye-Berardo volume on *Emerging Conceptual Frameworks in Family Analysis*, E. M. Rallings suggests: "Perhaps a merging of the interactional and situational frames of reference within sociology is indicated. We might call this framework the 'intersitial' conceptual framework."*

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of reinforcement, whether punishment or reward. Positive or negative evaluations of interpersonal experiences in any area of family interaction (sex, money, recreation) tend to be made in terms of the total relationship.

8. What schools or other community agencies can accomplish with a child depends on what families have already accomplished through their relationships.

9. Within the stable family there is strong enough and meaningful enough interpersonal relationship among its members to enable it to continue functioning in terms of the emotional needs of the individuals concerned.

10. Those families or groups which allow for individual growth within their circles are most successful in serving both the individual and society.

RELATIONSHIPS: PERCEPTION

The concept has become encrusted or surrounded by several other concepts. An emphasis upon individual interpretations or uniqueness runs through several references to interpersonal relationships in the family. Shibutani writes:

The formation of interpersonal relations occurs independently of customary procedures; hence, a variety of interpersonal relations may develop in the same conventional setting.

Thus, even when playing the same conventional roles different people become related to one another in different ways—ranging from orientations that are accepted to those that are proscribed. . . Similar interpersonal relations can be found in different conventional settings.

He refers to the family as "characterized by overlapping constellations of primary relations rather than a primary group."

According to Tyler:

The structural changes induced by experiences so influence future experiences (through choices as well as expectations) that no two children can possibly be exposed to the same interpersonal relationship experiences. . . Each individual is channeled into his own personal and unique sequence of experiences by that which he has already learned.

14 Kirkendall, op. cit., p. 129.
16 Nye and Berardo, op. cit., p. 192.
18 Ibid., p. 328.
19 Ibid., p. 425.

[References cited in the text are not included in the natural text representation.]
Out of this uniqueness of experience of individual family members, each builds his own perceptive screen through which he views his world. In an article in the Journal of Home Economics, Glenn Hawkes wrote:

Thus, to understand what a relationship means to an individual, we must know what he sees there. It is not sufficient or even realistic to assume that, because mother fondles a child, the child sees this situation as a sign that his mother loves him. It is not the physical nature of a stimulus which determines reaction but rather the way in which that stimulus is interpreted by the individual stimulated. In each case this will be an individual interpretation based upon the accumulation of his reactions, his biological and psychological makeup, and his own needs. Each new event which occurs within an individual’s field adds to and changes the content of his experience.22

This stress upon understanding individual perceptions or definitions of the situation does not imply that a relationship focus calls for “laissez-faire” practices in the family. In order to insure stability, relationships among family members are patterned by each society through a network of regulations applied to marital partners, parents, and children or between the family and the larger community. The members of a particular family, as well as members of reference relationships bound by religion, class, or ethnic origin, also develop common understandings or relationship patterns. These constitute the core of the cultural heritage each partner brings to a marriage.

What Herbert Blumer wrote about human beings in general applies doubly to family members.

Human beings [family members?] interpret or define each other’s actions instead of merely reacting to each other’s actions. Their “response” is not made directly to the actions of one another but instead is based on the meaning which they attach to such actions. Thus human interaction is mediated by the use of symbols, by interpretation, or by ascertaining the meaning of one another’s actions.23

Any scheme of human society claiming to be a realistic analysis has to respect and be congruent with the empirical recognition that a human society consists of acting units.24

To paraphrase Blumer, family life consists of acting units developing acts to meet the situa-

tions in which they are placed. Such action is formed or constructed by interpreting the situation. Then he indicates how stability is achieved.

Usually most of the situations encountered by people in a given society are defined or “structured” by them in the same way. Through previous interaction they develop and acquire common understandings or definitions of how to act in this or that situation. These common definitions enable people to act alike.25

Family life, as all social interaction, is an ongoing process in which each person continually checks his own behavior in response to real or anticipated reactions of other persons.

Some of the tensions in family life might be understood by examining the assumptions about relationships lying behind them. We hear such questions as “Won’t you be glad when your children reach twenty?” and “Why did she ever accept gifts from his mother anyway?” Such questions thinly veil what the speaker feels to be true about teen-agers or about mothers-in-law in relation to other family members.

The category into which a person is placed is a matter of considerable importance, for the motives that can be plausibly imputed to him depend upon it.26

In family and community life we tend to suffer from a hardening of the categories. Having once and for all decided what a person is like or how he acts, we behave toward him on the basis of these conceptions—or misconceptions—rather than in terms of attitudes open to change with experience. This is one of the reasons why adolescents may turn to adults outside the home to establish new relationships. The dramatic coach or the home economics teacher or the scout leader operate with a set of assumptions different from those used by parents. Also it may be hypothesized that when a parent serves successfully as a scout leader for her own child the chances are that she changed her assumptions.

Interpretations are applied not only to the other person or to the interpersonal relationship but also by the individual to himself. Strauss writes:

The sense that you make of your own life rests upon what concepts, what interpretations, you bring to bear upon the multitudinous and disorderly crowd of past acts. If your interpretations are convincing to yourself, if you trust your terminology, then there is some kind of continuous meaning assigned to your

24 Ibid., p. 187.
25 Shibutani, op. cit., p. 113.
life-as-a-whole. Different motives may be seen to have

drawn you at different periods, but the over-riding

purpose of your life may yet seem to retain a certain

unity and coherence. 26

In this context the welfare of family mem-

bers may be considered or perceived as relative
to the needs of the basic relationships upon

which the family is founded. 27 This does not

necessarily imply that a relationships-oriented

family is a family of sacrifice. The individual is

free to make any decisions or choices he must,

but he sees his well-being as related to the

well-being of the group. He learns to balance

those need-satisfactions which threaten the rela-
tionship with channels to need-satisfaction in

other relationships outside the family.

In some families the welfare of children is
given a priority so far above that of the parents
that the basic relationships upon which the fam-
ily is founded, those between husband and wife,
are strained or broken. A goal of mutu-
ality in relations gives an orientation to the
family. Shibutani writes of interpersonal rela-
tions as "the mutual orientations that develop
and crystallize among individuals who are in
sustained contact." 28 These mutual orientations

also serve to support and nourish the basic rela-
tionships of the family. Meissner writes of the

ways in which involvement in emotional inter-
action within the family affects some children

more and some less. 29

Winch indicates the need for the family to

improve patterns of interaction:

Since the relatively functionless family is charac-
terized by few roles and core relationships, it follows
that there are few norms on the basis of which such a
family can interact. Hence, they must improve pat-
terns of interaction. . . . Of course this development
has had profound implications for marital rela-
tionships, but perhaps the most significant implications
for the study of identification is that there is a lack of
normatively supported roles for parents to teach their
children. 30

He suggests that families, thus deprived of
definite objectives with respect to child rearing,
are open to all sorts of "expert" advice. One

might speculate as to whether there may be

References

26 Anselm Strauss in Rose (ed.), op. cit., p. 83.
27 K. Imogene and M. W. Kargman, "Is There a
Legal Conceptual Framework for the Study of the Family?" in
Nye and Berardo (eds.), op. cit., p. 279.
28 Shibutani. op. cit., p. 326.
29 W. W. Meissner, "Family Dynamics and Psycho-

somatic Processes," Family Process, 5:2 (September, 1966),
p. 151.
30 Robert F. Winch, Identification and Its Familial De-


some relationship between this lack of definite

objective in child rearing and the recently re-

ported finding from Feldman at Cornell that

the arrival of children poses a threat to the mar-

ital relationship. What makes it difficult or

sometimes impossible for marital relationships

and parental relationships to develop simulta-

neously within a family? Are there factors per-

ceived as originating outside the family, such as

pressures of social class or occupation, rather

than the presence of children, which tend to

generate dissatisfaction with the marital rela-
tionship? Is there a limit to how many or how

couple's patterns of interaction can be

improvised by individuals? These questions we

see as related to a study of perception of rela-
tionships.

Still another aspect of this factor of unique-
ness is indicated in an article by Spiegel:

What is functional for one member of the family
group may be dysfunctional for the family as a whole.
The opposite also holds: What is functional for the
family as a whole may have very harmful effects on
one person. These phenomena take place unwittingly,
not only because of unconscious dynamics within a
person, but also because of the operations of the sys-
tem of relations in which the members of the family
are involved. 31

Relationships: Communication

Basic to the development and maintenance of
interpersonal relationships is a process of com-
munication. From the dating interaction
through engagement into marriage and paren-
thood, the couple try out and practice ways of
transmitting messages to one another. As they

construct communication channels, at first tenta-

tively, then more permanently, they come to de-

velop a common outlook. Each formulates his

own perspectives as they reach consensus about

who speaks to whom and on what subjects and

with what degree of confidence. 32

How far the appreciable world of the family
extends is influenced by the effectiveness of the

communication patterns and habits developed.
The family members who go out into the com-

munity and return interpret to the family at

home what "people who are different" are like

and interpret to the wider world the nature of

their family relationships. Those who have had

the experience of living and working in another
country know what a barrier language can ap-
pear to be and how the imagination is taxed to

31 John P. Spiegel. "The Resolution of Role Conflict
1.
32 Shibutani. op. cit., p. 128.
set up communication channels, to build trust by the use of attitude, posture, or gesture.

Children learn to "read" their parents, to pick up cues to mood and feeling. A student once reported that in his home the children always knew what kind of day their father had had by whether he came up the front walk or went around to the back porch. They behaved accordingly, either rushing to greet him or hiding under the bed. Both were communicating what some have termed "relationships implications."

More research is needed on the processes of communication as influenced by attitudes or different frames of reference of family members. In some ways every marriage is a "mixed marriage." The two individuals come together with certain sets of assumptions and hypotheses about themselves, about the other, and about the relationship. The wider the gap between the two cultures being merged, the more difficult it may be to translate hypotheses into workable day-to-day relationships. In-laws and in-laws, teen-agers and parents find misunderstandings based on different frames of reference. Other factors which need study in this connection include: fatigue; stability or instability in the community setting; and pressures generated in outside relationships.

Improving one's art in relating to others is one of the requirements of growing up. In his book The Mature Mind, Harry Overstreet observed:

"Growth into maturity requires growth into self-confidence. It requires the experience of understanding other persons—playing with them, helping them in time of need, making shared plans with them. . . . A companionship of sharing is difficult between parents and children; the age-gap is too great; the difference in actual authority makes the pretense of equality ring false."

The home can be an ever-available laboratory for the development of gracious and intelligent communication. This is no small function for the home to perform. Far too many of the evils and the lonelinesses of life arise out of man's misunderstanding of men. In most homes there is no conversation; there are only competitive monologues of gossip, complaint, or command.

RELATIONSHIPS AND TIME

The nature of the total relationships in the family is conditioned by the factor of time and its use. In his presidential address to the 1963 annual meeting of the NCFR, Wallace Fulton called our attention to the topic "The American Family and Time." He pointed out that "all members of the family are both the creators and the victims of time pressure."85 And he stressed a need for study of the consequences of family time-utilization choices. Patterns of the interpersonal relationships which flow through the family life cycle spring from relationship experiences in the premarital hours (or days or weeks or months or years).

In writing of the experience of teen-agers who use sex as part of an affectional attachment, Kirkendall "has come to think of the investment of time as a sort of all-embracing factor which conditions the nature of the total relationship."86 And he surmises that "relationships that can stand the gaff of every-day life and the seering intensity of human interaction are not built as quickly as youth (and some of the rest of us) would like to think."87 He characterizes time as a valuable protective measure during engagement.

A relationship between time spent in the total relationship and liaison level has been demonstrated. The capacity for full and honest communication and the trust and confidence that make one value the worth of his relationship are not built by wishing. Motives become similar and each-other centered only as a couple build an understanding of each other, and this takes time.88

A symbolic residue of the lapse of time in a family relationship is the use of humor, especially family stories and jokes. The prospective bride is aware of this when she makes her first visit to the home of her husband-to-be. A visitor may feel that he has entered a group which has its unique universe of discourse. Everyone has been tutored excepting him.

Miller and Westman, in describing properties of relationships, use the term "altercasting" as a label for the "pressures one exerts on others in a mutual endeavor by assuming a particular sub-identity."89

They write:

"The longer the average couple lives together and works toward the same goals the more successful they

86 Kirkendall, op. cit., p. 137.
87 Ibid., p. 159.
88 Ibid., p. 177.
become in thinking, feeling, and acting together in coordinated ways. The mutual alternating provides the pattern of the couple's coordinated activities; this we call teamwork.

If the relationship survives, the average couple gradually becomes adept at adjusting to the contradictions of presented and private relationships.43

Crises are met in the family on the basis of relationships established through time. There has been much, or some, or little practice in goal-directed activity, for example. There has been limited or extensive opportunity for developing short-run or long-range plans.

Perhaps more than ever in the past, families of the decades ahead may have leisure through which relationships may be developed, expanded, or enriched. Dr. De Grazia writes of the variability in meaning given to the use of time.

By using the strictly quantitative assembly-line conception of time—time as a moving belt of equal units—one ignores the significance of much activity. A moment of awe in religion, or ecstasy in love, or orgasm in intercourse, a decisive blow to an enemy, relief in a sneeze, or death in a fall, is treated as equal to a moment of riding on the bus, shoveling coal, or eating beans. As a matter of fact, in most research the former kind of moments get left out altogether.44

The life of leisure leads to a greater sensitivity not to truth alone, but also to beauty, to the wonder of man and nature, to its contemplation and its re-creation, in word or song, clay, colors, or stone. The artist as well as the thinker is a child of slow time.45

Speakers at meetings of parents and teachers occasionally point out the pressures currently foisted on children. The question is raised: Why can children no longer be children? One area which is sacrificed in pushing adult pressures downward is that of time to build and to practice relationships.

One may speculate as to whether one result of over-pressuring the young may be their self-defensive withdrawal from the rush of social participation. Strauss writes: "Viewed more longitudinally interaction is punctuated by much longer phases than mere withdrawal from conversation for thought and sleep."46

Many people declare moratoria. . . . They also declare periods for resting upon laurels after success, periods for personal trial or probation, periods for expiation of sins, periods for contemplation, periods for prolonged self-searching.47

Time is required for the inception of relationships, for their maintenance, and for phasing them out. Both in activity and in inactivity, relationships are influenced.

RELATIONSHIPS AND DEVELOPMENT

Adler and others see the individual as maturing through his contact with persons. But because this process commences with relationships within the family and the family, therefore, has such indelible influence on the formative years of the personality, how can an individual really progress in developing interpersonal relations? Does he not spend his emotional energy throughout life trying to establish relationships which are satisfying because they make him feel worthy, bolster his self-image, and at the same time sloughing off or discarding relationships which threaten or fail to coincide with his early-formed self-image?

Edward Tyler states:

By the time a child is of school age he will have experienced all the possible types of relationships that he can ever have with another human being, a) dependency, b) autonomy, c) competitive reciprocal and, d) cooperative reciprocal. Whatever he learns is superimposed on his earlier experiences and can only be variations of his original four relationships.48

What might constitute evidences of maturity or development through relationships?

1. Capacity for understanding and inventing new interpersonal relationship patterns. Sullivan suggested:

One is superior, or average, or unfortunately inferior with respect to the progress of one's development in interpersonal relations—that is, as we ordinarily say it, in personality development. One is, in other words, outstanding in one's capacity for understanding and invention of new interpersonal patterns, and so on; or one is below average—that is, literally backward in the evolution of interpersonal relations. There can be very real foundations for a juvenile's being backward in this area, if, for example, illness comes at critical periods and cuts him out of school recurrently, or if something prevents his participation in games which enjoy great prestige in that particular school group. It can come about by social handicap . . . social mobility of the parents.49

43 Ibid., p. 54.
44 De Grazia, op. cit., p. 365.
46 Anselm Strauss, op. cit., p. 80.
47 Ibid., p. 81.
48 Tyler, op. cit., p. 293.
2. Recognition of the sources of his motivations to behavior and the extent of his personal involvement in conventional categories based on age, sex, social class, etc.

3. Movement from predominantly dependent relationships toward relationships of autonomy or reciprocity. To cite Tyler again:

"The newborn child and his adults must initially adapt to each other in a mutually dependent relationship. . . . Only after he trusts the dependency relationship can he progress toward further psychological maturity. Indefinitely, however, the usual human response to the perception of a threat to his integrity is to regress to a dependent relationship with another human."

The difference between the "healthy" and "unhealthy" use of regression is measured by the rate of recoverability to the type of relationship existing prior to the time of stress was perceived. 47

4. The extent to which an individual builds relationships on the basis of defense. Brown characterizes certain feelings as "real":

"Those feelings which exist in each individual but are often not allowed to surface due to what other members of the family expect. . . . A relationship can exist on the basis of real feelings or on the basis of a defensive pretense. Most individuals utilize a defensive pretense rather than their real feelings. Therefore the basis of an intrafamily relationship is often a defensive pretense rather than real (. . . true) feelings." 48

We assume that defensive feelings, however, may be perceived by an individual as just as "real" as those which are openly expressed. Progress toward maturity in relating might be seen in the relative extent to which defensiveness appeared as a rationale for relationships-maintenance.

5. Skill in resolving the conflict between trust and mistrust in incipient relationships. We see this as an ability to establish stable relationships. Hess and Handel write:

"A stable human relationship is one in which the members have reached a high degree of consensus about one another; the terms in which personal worth may be demonstrated are clear and are shared. Their interaction is an exchange of testimony of what the members are to one another. The action of each person in his family testifies to his image of it, of himself, and of the others." 49

Early dating relationships, for example, are characteristically unstable. In various ways each person tests the other to discover how much he or she cares, what he can believe, when is he "only joking," when does humor become barbed or person-directed, or how consistent over time is his behavior. Until each has resolved this dilemma within limits that can be tolerated, he can scarcely become committed to a relationship. Some persons find intimacy in social relationships uncomfortable and always maintain a safe, perhaps polite distance.

6. The six components of interpersonal competence discussed by Foote and Cottrell might be seen as checkpoints for examining level of maturity in relationships. We would mention one in particular: empathy. Individuals need to develop a capacity for being several persons in their imagination.

7. Acknowledgement of interrelatedness with others accompanies maturity in developing relationships. In The Purpose of Higher Education, Huston Smith wrote:

"Mature responsibility begins at the point where the individual acknowledges his interrelatedness with others. This calls for outgrowing all juvenile notions to the effect that society is simply a clumsy device for spoiling the individual's fun by keeping him from doing what he wants to do. Society is the necessary condition of humanity, and every human being should accept it as part of himself. This being true, a healthy concern for one's own welfare ought to extend to a similar concern for the welfare of society." 50

As Brown indicates in the reference cited earlier, 51 it is the degree of interdependence among family members rather than comradeship or companionship which calls for the existence of the family as a group. Just as true perspective for study of the family can be obtained when it is examined in relationship to other groups and to individuals outside its orbit, so does the individual need the perspective of his interrelatedness in order to develop.

RESULTANTS OF RELATIONSHIPS I: IDENTITY

The literature occasionally refers to products or results or, more properly, resultants of the action and interaction within the family. Two examples are identity and "emotional climate."

The roots of personal identity are found in family relationships. In terms of relationships, identity refers to "where am I?" As Stone

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47 Tyler, op. cit., p. 289.
51 Brown, op. cit., p. 192.
writes, "When one has identity he is situated... that is, cast in the shape of a social object by the acknowledgement of his participation or membership in social relations."52

Among the first requirements that an individual places on society is the opportunity to develop a sense of personal identity and integrity. Each person craves a sense of his own self-consistency which he obtains from the transactions or interrelating with other individuals.

Identity is intrinsically associated with all the joinings and departures of social life. To have an identity is to join with some and depart from others, to enter and leave social relations at once.53

An individual's selection of which relations he enters and leaves or when he enters some relations and leaves others reflects his preference for those experiences which strengthen his image of where he "should" stand in relation to others. He tries to bring his world into a "fit" with the conception he has of himself, of others, and of the interrelationship.

Self-conceptions, once they are fixed in habit, tend to be self-sustaining. Since all perception is selective, each person is sensitized to those cases which tend to support his expectations.54

Achieving a sense of identity is more difficult in disintegrated communities where human relationships are transient and superficial than in integrated communities, that is, communities with unifying values, goals, or symbols.

As Shibutani points out, "What holds one's experience together and provides a sense of identity is not substance, but a coordinated structure of activities."55

This coordination is not the open, overt process considered by community organization specialists. It is rather a process which takes place within each individual as he seeks to make organized sense of his world.

Again parents play a major role in establishing the criteria by which the child determines his preferences. "Parents teach their children how to relate to others, whom to like and emulate, whom to avoid and derogate, how to express love and animosity, and when to withhold response."56

The song from *South Pacific*, "You Have to be Carefully Taught," illustrates this.

52 Rose (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 93.
53 Ibid., p. 94.
54 Ibid., *op. cit.*, p. 230.
55 Ibid.

**Resultants of Relationships II: "Emotional Climate"**

The prevailing intensity or quality of family relationships has been characterized by some writers as the "emotional climate" or "emotional atmosphere" in a family. Shibutani states that how a person feels and what he does often depends upon the web of interpersonal relations in which he is involved. In each primary group there is a prevailing "emotional atmosphere" which develops in the interaction of the distinct combination of personalities.57

And in another context he writes: "Conformity to norms leads to formation of a dominant mood that surrounds the collectivity like an atmosphere."58

Other day-to-day practices in interpersonal relationships may likewise lead to the "formation of a dominant mood." Sharing perspectives in defining or analyzing problems might set the family "emotional climate," for example.

**Communicating the Concept**

1. **Relationships in Focus**

Urie Bronfenbrenner distinguishes three occupational orientations: relationship, skill, and production.

An occupation is classified as predominantly relationship oriented if the work is principally concerned with getting along with others—i.e., establishing and maintaining relationships. . . A job is classified as predominantly production-oriented if quotas of volume are paramount. If retention or advancement on the job depends primarily on standards of workmanship, the occupation is classified as predominantly skill-oriented.59

Herein lies the kernel of our hypotheses about family relationships as a unifying concept in professional work with families. There is considerable agreement—at least in the literature—about the significance of the family, through its relationships system, upon individual personality development throughout the life span. There is considerable agreement that this function of the family may be more significant now than it has been, may become more significant than it is now. But how much of the professional writing, teaching, counseling, advising, or other family-directed effort is relationship-oriented and how much of it is focussed on skill or production jobs?

Several writers have been trying to convince

58 Ibid., p. 42.
59 Winch, *op. cit.*, p. 103.
us that how couples before, during, or after marriage deal with the area of sex reflects the underlying relationships they have evolved. But sex manuals still read like "rules for doing it" or "improving standards of workmanship." And some high-school courses still stress vocabulary drill; while others work to improve home-making skills of all kinds, which is a laudable effort but does not fall within a relationship orientation.

2. To the National Council on Family Relations

Implications for a family-relationships focus or an interpersonal relationships focus among professionals are many and relevant at various levels of our work. To merit continued professional standing, the National Council on Family Relations might appropriately, through its Research and Theory Section, move toward clarification of the concepts in its name. As a Council we have a mandate to exhibit through our programs, our meetings, and our publications respect for professional competence wherever it is found. Tolerance must be replaced by understanding—understanding growing into appreciation—as we communicate across different professional walls and out of varying professional frameworks. From such communication may develop increased commitment to common concerns related to human development in families.

Our understanding and appreciation must be sincere enough, our communication channels broad enough, our frames of reference viable enough to encompass skill-oriented or production-oriented workers along with those who profess to be relationships-focused. But if we continue to be a Council on Family Relations, it may be appropriate to explore ways in which relations indeed may become central to our concern and our commitment.

3. For the University

Many of us are located as professionals in educational settings: high school, community, or university. We have been involved in sporadic and increasingly complex reorganizations of courses, departments, and colleges. On our own campus the organization of the new College of Human Development represents an effort in one way to focus educational experiences on the concerns of people in a society-to-be. Implicitly it is recognized that decisions affecting the development or well-being of each individual are made not alone by the citizen, nor in the family, nor at a community gathering, nor in the halls of government. But there must appear an interrelatedness between individual, family, community, and wider world if significant and critical problems facing humanity are to be solved. Whether or not this new organization will accomplish its mission will depend in part on the extent to which professionals can move from competition through cooperation to coordination and integrated commitment. It is never an easy or a simple matter for professionals to come together with professionals from other areas. So the task of the new college is somewhat parallel to that of the National Council and like that of the colleges of home economics where quite disparate elements are housed together in hybrid harmonization.

And then for each of us in community, counseling agency, service, or classroom, there may be some approaches worth exploring if we want to communicate relationships as a concept with relevance for living.

4. For Research

Expansion and replication of research already conducted merit intensive effort. The conceptual components of interpersonal competence as suggested by Foote and Cottrell have not yet been adequately analyzed in the family framework. The attitudinal ingredients of an interpersonal relationship, as formulated by Carl Rogers—congruence, empathy, positive regard, and perception—should be studied not only in counselor-client relationships but also in intrafamily relationships. The framework of prior, present, and consequent relations, delineated by Schutz, might lead to derivation of additional principles. The four basic principles—affection, respect, help, and approval—derived from studies of parent-child relationships by Ethel Waring at Cornell merit further testing in various ages and stages and in additional cultural settings.

Aaron Rutledge speaks of "nearness" as "the thing most necessary to human beings." How are relationships of "nearness" maintained among family members in a mobile society where war, work, or transportation itself forces separateness? How can concepts be clarified or new ones evolved which will serve to integrate relations-oriented research?

In the family literature it is frequently noted that terms in common usage refer to individual behavior rather than to relationships, although relationships might be the point of reference. Factors such as the following imply a relation—

ship: comunication, conflict, compatibility, or roles. Person-centered or individual-oriented factors include needs, behavior pattern, adjustment process, motivation, attitude, empathy, identification, flexibility, or awareness of goals. To analyze relationships an expansion of the shorter list is needed.

Perhaps the following dimensions of relationships which appear in various publications could be systematized and clarified. Clearer categories are needed to denote each dimension.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship Dimension</th>
<th>Range</th>
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<td>Duration or timing</td>
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<td>Extended</td>
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<td>Stability</td>
<td>Sporadic</td>
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<td>Intrafamily</td>
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<td>Person</td>
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<td>Product</td>
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5. For Pre-Professional Education

If relationships are central in our professional concern, more attention must be given in pre-professional education and orientation to help the individual be "free with his past." Carl Rogers observed:

It seems to me that most of our professional training programs make it more difficult for the individual to be himself and more likely that he will play a professional role. Often he becomes so burdened with theoretical and diagnostic baggage that he becomes less able to understand the inner world of another person as it seems to that person.

His studies indicate quite clearly that, by assessing a relationship early in its existence, we can to some degree predict the probability of its being a relationship which makes for growth. Can a better job be done of assessing relationships of professionals-in-training so that knowledge of their functioning may provide motivation for further learning? This is being done in centers for counseling education, but in some other pre-professional centers only superficially through "practicums" which bind or restrict instead of freeing. The stress needs to be upon experience in relationships, less on techniques used or reported. Thus it comes to be, as Rogers states, that "imperfect human beings can be of therapeutic assistance to other imperfect human beings."62 His overall hypothesis is this:

If I can provide a certain type of relationship, the other person will discover within himself the capacity to use that relationship for growth, and change and personal development will occur.

6. For Counseling

Within the framework we are discussing, it is the business of counselors to offer a relationship to those who have failed in a relationship to others. To meet the needs of persons in search of relationships, lay leadership as well as professionals are called for today.

Sometimes people are simply lonely. They may have anxieties about their personal worth and may seek evidence of their desirability. If so, they become receptive to almost any overture by another human being.

Kirkendall calls for an appraisal of the total relationship in searching for the meaning of specific behavior in counseling or service.

The important condition in understanding the meaning of sex and its significance in strengthening or weakening a relationship is to avoid fastening our attention upon sex, or making the determination of whether or not a specific act has occurred our major concern. We need instead to be concerned much more broadly with relationships and the various factors and circumstances which make them meaningful or destroy their meaning for those involved in them.

In the treatment of emotionally disturbed children, the concept of disturbance has often been relocated or extended so that—most often—the mother-child relationship rather than the personality of either one is regarded as the locus of disturbance. It is not always easy, however, for caseworkers to treat relationship problems in the context of a philosophy that does not see relationship problems as primary.

7. For Leisure-use Education

The concept or meaning of relationships in the family may be communicated through exploring family use of leisure. This topic has re-

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62 Ibid., p. 215.
63 Ibid., p. 33.
64 Shibutani, op. cit., p. 343.
65 Kirkendall, op. cit., p. 200.
ceived less attention by professionals in the family field than some other topics which occupy more space in books. There is a need to explore the use of leisure in terms of freedom to build or maintain relationships. We tend to think of it in quite the opposite way, as space or time to be “filled” with some organized activity. In the report Of Time, Work, and Leisure, Sebastian De Grazia writes:

What a man does when he does not have to do anything he does for its own sake, but he does not think of it as fun or having a good time. It may be difficult or easy, pleasant or unpleasant, and look suspiciously like hard work, but it is something he wants to do. That is all.48

Because little free or leisure time is available to professionals and the amount is not expanding, we tend to neglect its significance in the life space and life style of others. Burgess and Wallin found different relationships between marital adjustment and various levels of shared leisure activity. Few other researchers have followed up their lead. What happens to family relationships when every minute is “organized”? What happens when interests and recreational needs of family members are incompatible, inconsistent with each other or with their demands on family resources? If “the family that plays together stays together” is really true, how do they like it? Do they feel like sardines together—in a can—dead? Or is leisure used as a time for enriching relationships, for building new channels of communication, new bases of competence, new supports for respect?

8. For the Community

The challenges of creating an industrial, metropolitan civilization are essentially problems of social invention and creativity in interpersonal relationships. These are not so much connected with the work life as they are with community life. Community bases must be established for provision of some of the supports requisite for family relationships: health, housing, recreation, education, and counseling. The community must become more sensitive and responsive to the teachable moments throughout the life span.

Focus on family relationships carries implications for all community-based family services. Space permits only a few illustrations. Effective professionals in the field of foods and nutrition are aware that a mother needs more than knowl-

dge of “the basic four” to see that her family is well nourished. A measure of TLC, the setting of family meals, and use of the time at meals for family battles all enter the picture. These involve relationships.

In the field of health and rehabilitation, the “therapeutic community” is a case in point. It is being recognized within this context that, in the process of recovery from illness or in maintenance of good health, more relationships than those of the physician-patient are necessary.

In quite another context, E. C. Hughes refers to one example of a way in which policy or practice of a community agency, in this case a hospital, appears to sacrifice family relationships in its concern for other values and other purposes indirectly related to family well-being. His example, of course, is not representative of all hospitals.

The modern hospital in its anxiety to appear to be a place where all patients get well, refuses to allow relatives to gather for a ceremonial parting from a loved one, and condemns the dying to sanitary solitude. If there be any triumph in death, our generation will not be there to see it.47

In the field of gerontology more research is needed to assess the significance of family and community relationships on the total aging process. Sociologists write of the disengagement of older persons from their instrumentally production-oriented activities. This phase, with the support of society, is seen as preparing the individual for the final withdrawal from life itself. Relationships-maintenance might be a unifying principle which ties together the pre- and post-work periods.

Sullivan believes that interpersonal relations are important in individual development far beyond the early years. The family is seen as one of many institutions which directly affects the personality formation of the individual and, throughout the life span, affects its functioning. Life must be viewed as a continuous socialization, a series of careers, in which old identities are sacrificed as new identities are appropriated, in which old relations are left behind, as new relations are joined.48

To cite another example, the field of community planning has in general been oriented too much to things and space and too little to personalities or families or relationships. We do not know yet all of the ways in which the com-

48 De Grazia, op. cit., p. 82.


munity milieu affects the directions of personality development or of family life styles. Paul Miller has observed that we Americans live in an "untidy society." To what extent are interpersonal relationships enriched or tarnished by clutter, confusion, ugliness, or squalor? Is it too far to stretch the imagination to suggest that we might even gain creative perspectives on family and other interpersonal relationships by seeing them in art, or dance, or music, or drama? Ideas in these forms exhibit more than one side.

Few, if any, community services to the family are more needed or more significant than parent education. Here again relationships might be brought more centrally into focus. Expectant parents need to understand some of the ways in which their first child will alter the balance of their relationship. Before and following the arrival of the child they need to experiment with their time management alone and together so that their own needs mutually satisfied may be integrated with satisfying the dependency needs of the child. Perhaps parent educators should look at the three stages of group development outlined by Schutz—inclusion, control, and affection—for clues to help parents in building relationships.69

We may need to encourage parents to develop an ability to make mistakes or a courage to make mistakes or to permit mistakes to be made. Or perhaps what is needed is the discovery of inner strengths to enable a family of mistake-makers to live together! This comes less from following prescriptions or rule-memorizing than from practicing principles of relations-management in action. The effects of values on relationships within the family are of concern to parents, especially when values are perceived as representing an attack from the outer world rather than a reinforcement from the outer world.

Whereas community measurement is usually carried out in terms of productivity, economic resources, or population trends, we are suggesting looking at the community for evidence of what happens there in family or other interpersonal relationships. These are not products but resultants of interacting community forces.

Perhaps we are calling for what Ward Goodenough terms a "change in our categories" here.

A change in the categories by which we perceive things, in our criteria for evaluating what we perceive, or in our habits of using these categories and criteria will necessarily lead to new experiences of our own selves, even when objectively there has been no change in our circumstances.70

As we work in community settings, attempting to enrich family relationships, it may be possible for us to do more demonstration than telling; to help family members anticipate impending changes in status or roles; to stimulate their commitment to anticipated change; and to experiment with experiences in relationships which test the selves they know and the selves they may become.71

9. For Education

Several years ago a periodical with national circulation carried an article with the heading "Can Marriage Be Taught?" It is equally appropriate to ask a parallel question: Can family relationships be taught? There is evidence that both questions may be answered in the affirmative, depending on what is to be taught, by whom, and when.

When one teaches about "relationships," there are no firmly established guidelines or expectations, no universal norms to which one can turn for help. Nationally gathered data are available in statistical terms for such matters as births or mortality; food consumed; shelter rented or purchased; or ages at marriage, divorce, or death. But how does one document—to be academically respectable—the meanings of these and other interesting facts? Or how does one weigh and measure the resources devoted by families to relationships-maintenance?

We leave to your judgment whether or not you agree with us up to this point that the concept of family relationships can be communicated. Some of the implications indicated for other professional areas may also apply to the teaching-learning situation. There are others, more specifically relevant. We suggest them as hypotheses, not as laws.

Communicating about family relationships becomes meaningful only when the teaching-learning situation is seen as one process. We tend to pay too much attention to what one individual, the teacher, should "do" and too little to what happens between teacher and student when their relationship is one of learning together. This calls for stressing the responsibility of the student in learning as he likewise comes to assume responsibility for developing a kind of relationship appropriate to himself and his


11 Ibid., p. 221.
spouse and children. In order to overcome resistance to change and to provide practice in communication, discussion or problem-solving becomes a relationships laboratory. Awareness is increased, sensitivity sharpened through the opening to the light of analysis of subjects hidden by ignorance. When cultural or religious biases are activated, alternatives are presented and the group or the individual in the group is not criticized.

Just as families find it difficult to alter their basic patterns of relationships to adjust to new conditions, so it is hard for teachers and students to overcome ingrown habits. Yet there is a need to learn how to develop flexibility and to exercise judgment, not to be a slave to the "system."

We who would teach "relationships" must work to bring the student beyond the generalization, "It all depends on how you look at it." This is an oversimplification of the concept of individual differences, applied to perception. A college particularly must teach more than "what everybody knows." In marriage, once a commitment to a relationship as husband and wife has been made, daily life may bring re-commitment. This evolves out of more shared or common perceptions which come to exert a power over succeeding decisions.

Parents are committed to the parent-child relationship when or if they decide to become parents. Children are not committed to this relationship in the same way but may learn to function within it and grow through its support. Eventually they may come to perceive the relationship as interfering with other relations to which they must commit themselves. Realistic orientation of students to future relationships as parents must include the process of freeing or growing out of relationships as well as that of building relationships.

Effective teaching about relationships, just as teaching about any concepts or ideas, demands a conviction on the part of the teacher, in this case a sharing of the worth of interpersonal and specifically family relationships.

Another implication for teaching comes out of the recent attempts to devise ways of tackling problems of poverty through education. Experience is showing that skill training alone is not sufficient. Alan Thomas, Executive Director of the Canadian AAE, reminds us of a phrase which may be relevant to teaching about relationships, "learning by heart." He says:

Surely the briefest scramble through the complex and sophisticated discussions and writing about the value of education in the elimination or alleviation of poverty reveals that it is learning by heart that is being talked about. It is so obvious in that context that the simple appeal to the mind, the trained skill and perception is utterly useless unless the will, the belief, the sense of person and self is somehow met, admitted and responded to.  

Perhaps "learning by heart" comes close to the development of empathy. To catch the process of interpretation, to understand the diversity of meanings attached to a single behavior, the student must be able to feel with the family unit he is trying to study. He must be encouraged to look for and find challenging family relationships continually in flux. He must use such concepts as status or role as tools for understanding behavior, not as explanations of behavior or as blocks to further learning. He learns to find parallels between family relationships and interpersonal relations in his daily living and to use the latter to learn about the former. This calls for clarifying perceptions or images and coming to grips with distortions or discrepancies between his interpretations and those of others. He learns to sort the essence from the trappings of relationships. He comes to see that not all behavior is rational, but may be purposeful in respect to maintaining relationships.

Combs and Loper comment:

Although both "good" and "poor" teachers know what ideal relationships ought to be like, it is certain they do not equally put these understandings into effect. The distinguishing factor lies not in what teachers know they ought to do but in whether or not they do what they know they ought.  

So at this point we rest our case—and probably the reader. We have attempted to indicate that the concept "family relationships" has been widely used without definition. We have outlined some of the assumptions associated with the term in the literature. We have suggested some of the implications for professionals who might see "family relationships" as a unifying concept or focus in their work on behalf of families. We close with a restatement of a problem in communication: I know you believe you understand what you think I said, but I am not sure you realize that what you read is not what I meant.