Carroll C. Arnold

Distinguished Lecture 2009

Discursive Struggles of Relating

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NCA

The Carroll C. Arnold Distinguished Lecture

O n October 8, 1994, the Administrative Committee of the National Communication Association established the Carroll C. Arnold Distinguished Lecture. The Arnold Lecture is given in plenary session each year at the annual convention of the Association and features the most accomplished researchers in the field. The topic of the lecture changes annually so as to capture the wide range of research being conducted in the field and to demonstrate the relevance of that work to society at large.

The purpose of the Arnold Lecture is to inspire not by words but by intellectual deeds. Its goal is to make the members of the Association better informed by having one of its best professionals think aloud in their presence. Over the years, the Arnold Lecture will serve as a scholarly stimulus for new ideas and new ways of approaching those ideas. The inaugural Lecture was given on November 17, 1995.

The Arnold Lecturer is chosen each year by the First Vice President. When choosing the Arnold Lecturer, the First Vice President is charged to select a long-standing member of NCA, a scholar of undisputed merit who has already been recognized as such, a person whose recent research is as vital and suggestive as his or her earlier work, and a researcher whose work meets or exceeds the scholarly standards of the academy generally.

The Lecture has been named for Carroll C. Arnold, Professor Emeritus of Pennsylvania State University. Trained under Professor A. Craig Baird at the University of Iowa, Arnold was the co-author (with John Wilson) of *Public Speaking as a Liberal Art*, author of *Criticism of Oral Rhetoric* (among other works), and co-editor of *The Handbook of Rhetorical and Communication Theory*. Although primarily trained as a humanist, Arnold was nonetheless one of the most active participants in the New Orleans Conference of 1968 which helped put social scientific research in communication on solid footing. Thereafter, Arnold edited *Communication Monographs* because he was fascinated by empirical questions. As one of the three founders of the journal *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Arnold also helped move the field toward increased dialogue with the humanities in general. For these reasons and more, Arnold was dubbed "The Teacher of the Field" when he retired from Penn State in 1977. Dr. Arnold died in January of 1997.

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F. Wendell Miller Distinguished Professor
Communication Studies
University of Iowa

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Leslie A. Baxter (University of Oregon, 1975) has taught at the University of Montana, Lewis & Clark College, The University of California-Davis, and for the past 15 years, the University of Iowa, where she is F. Wendell Miller Distinguished Professor of Communication Studies. She has almost 140 publications, including 7 books, on various topics in interpersonal and family communication. She is honored to be the recipient of several awards, including the NCA Distinguished Scholar Award, the Bernard Brommel Award, the Charles Woolbert Award, the Franklin Knower Award, and the Gerald Miller Award, the WSCA Scholar Award, and the IARR Berscheid-Hatfield Award.

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Thank you, Dawn Braithwaite, for this opportunity to join a distinguished list of fellow lecturers who, since 1995, have honored the memory of Carroll Arnold. Although Professor Arnold was trained as a scholar of rhetoric in the humanistic tradition, he engaged in outreach to the social scientific side of the house, including his active participation in the 1968 New Orleans Conference that was "ground zero" for giving voice to a social scientific perspective in the discipline. I was in my freshman year of college at the time of that famous conference and quite oblivious to the space it created for me and many others to have a home in Communication Studies. Because my own scholarly commitments to the human sciences sit on the border between humanistic and social scientific traditions, I feel a special affinity to Professor Arnold and am personally honored to be speaking today in a venue that bears his name.

Leslie A Baxter delivering the Carroll C. Artnold Distinguished Lecture at the NCA Annual Convention in Chcicago.

The convention theme for this, the 95th NCA Convention, "Discourses of Stability and Change," underscores that "multiple discourses are at the heart of meaning-making." My lecture elaborates on this theme, because its central claim is that everyday relating—the ongoing work of constituting acquaintanceships, friendships, romantic relationships, committed romantic partnerships, familial relationships, group memberships, and workplace relationships—is constructed from the struggle of competing discourses that animate interpersonal communication.

My remarks today rely on my forthcoming book, called *Voicing Relationships* (Baxter, in press), in which I articulate the second generation of a theory originally published in 1996 with Barbara Montgomery, Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT) (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). RDT is but one of several dialectically-oriented theories of relating, unique in its application of the dialogism work of the Russian theorist of language and culture, Mikhail Bakhtin. Barbara had the good sense (or not!) to turn to upper administration immediately after publication of our book, but I have spent the intervening years in the scholarly trenches, engaged in research activity with many wonderful colleagues, including Dawn Braithwaite, to illuminate the discursive struggles that animate our everyday relating.

Growing a theory, I have come to appreciate, is a process not unlike parenting a child. It is initially presented to the world in its formal articulation, akin to the birth or adoption announcement; it requires nurturance as it takes its initial steps into the scholarly conversation; it ultimately establishes independence from the original scholar(s) who raised it, and it continues to develop and evolve throughout its lifespan. I have been blessed to witness the use of RDT by many researchers across a range of fields, but especially interpersonal and family communication (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2006; Braithwaite & Baxter, 2008; Stamp, 2004). My goal today is to share some of what we have come to understand about relating, drawing largely from my own research program informed by RDT.

My remarks are organized into three major parts. First, for the benefit of scholars unfamiliar with Bakhtin, I open with a very short summary of his dialogism project as I have poached it. (Communication scholars unfamiliar with Bakhtin is a fairly large group, by the way, which has always struck me as ironic given that Bakhtin (1986a, p. 84) argued from the early 1950s onward for a distinct field of study that he called "speech communication" to correct for what he regarded as the inattention given to speaking in Saussure's (1983) focus on language as a structural system.) Second, I am going to introduce the core Bakhtinian concept of the utterance chain. I will use this concept as a way to organize my discussion of some types of discursive struggles that animate relating. Third, I will address the concept of interplay, the process through which discourses struggle with and against each other to produce meaning. Let me first speak briefly about Bakhtin's theory of dialogism.

Bakhtin's Dialogism

Bakhtin's fifty-year record of productivity, from about 1920-1970, has been labeled "dialogism" by Michael Holquist (2002) because "dialogue" is the underlying motif in the Bakhtin project. Let me be clear at the outset, however, that Bakhtin's "dialogue" is not a stereotypical "feel good" affair; in which two parties bear their souls in a seamless encounter of "really communicating" (Katriel & Philipsen, 1981). Instead "dialogue" is a conception of talk as meaning-making that emerges from the interplay of different, often competing, discourses. "The living utterance," said Bakhtin (1981), "cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads. . . . It enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of [them], merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with [others]" (pp. 276-77). Dialogue, in other words, is a site of contradictory intertextuality (Allen, 2000).

The discursive agitation of the utterance was described by Bakhtin (1981) as centripetal-centrifugal struggle. Bakhtin used the *centripetal-centrifugal* distinction to mark the inequality of discourses in struggle. Put simply, discourses rarely interact on a level playing field. The term *centripetal* refers to moving toward centralization or the center, whereas the term *centrifugal* refers to the opposite dynamic of moving away from the center toward the margins. In the context of the social world, these terms hold implications for power in that what is marginalized is easily forgotten or delegitimized relative to what is centered. The center is easily legitimated as normative, typical, and natural, and thus it functions as a baseline against which all else is somehow positioned as a deviation. The centripetal thus occupies a position of privilege relative to the centrifugal, and herein rests its power. We can hear this unequal jockeying between discourses in the following passage from an online letter from Charlie and Lynn, prospective adoptive parents, who are writing a "Dear Birth Mother" letter to pregnant women who may be searching for an adoptive family:

> After struggling with infertility and miscarriage we have discovered that we just want a child to love. It doesn't matter how that bond comes into our life, it will be a top priority to make sure it is real and strong, built by love and faith. We know that no matter how they come to us our children will bless us in ways we can't begin to understand as we teach them and love them. (Norwood & Baxter, 2009, interview #3)

The dominant cultural discourse of parenting that circulates in mainstream U.S. society positions adoption as a last resort when a couple can't reproduce "naturally." Charlie and Lynn admit that they began with a desire to parent through pregnancy but have experienced a change of heart. This couple repeats twice for the birth mother that "it doesn't matter" how the child enters their lives. They have a priority to make the bond "real" through love. The words of this pair are working hard to dethrone the dominant cultural discourse of parenting and replace it with an alternative discourse in which genetic bonds are supplanted with bonds of the heart.

Power is a term with multiple meanings, and the use I am making of the concept departs from the typical view advanced in the interpersonal and family communication literature, in which scholars conceptualize power as a person's ability to produce effects in others (Berger, 1994). By contrast, a Bakhtinian conception of power is closer to Foucault's (1977, 1980, 1988) view in which "Power resides in the discursive practices and formations themselves" (Deetz, 2001, p. 35). In other words, power resides in the systems of meaning—the discourses—through which social reality as we know it is constructed. Centripetal discourses, by definition, are more powerful than centrifugal discourses because their systems of meaning are centered or legitimated as social reality. To be sure, the interests of social groups or individuals are differentially served dependent on which discourses are centered, but such power is derived from dominant discourses.

My dialogically-grounded approach to communication thus departs from mainstream interpersonal and family communication in two important respects that I want to be clear about before proceeding further. First, my approach eschews the individual as the centerpiece of study, decentering it to focus instead on discourses. Interpersonal/family communication scholars have generally presumed that a

monadic individual is the analytic linchpin in studying communication (e.g., Hewes & Planalp, 1987), and cognitively-oriented work holds a place of prominence in current research (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008). The typical focus is on how individual speakers make sense of communication and relationships, or on how autonomous individuals plan and then implement communication messages. Dialogism instead moves to the social, in which meaning is located in the "between"—that is, in the interplay between competing discourses. From this alternative perspective, a speaker's utterance is not a mere representational expression of his or her inner state but is instead an intertextual "between."

Second, in recognizing that communication is inherently a power-laced process of centripetal-centrifugal struggle, my approach aligns with the critical tradition more so than with the positivistic or interpretive traditions that populate the landscape of interpersonal and family communication research (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2006; Braithwaite & Baxter, 2008). From the perspective of mainstream research, power is a discretionary matter of scholarly interest: a scholar interested in studying power is free to do so (and many have), but a scholar need not feel required to study power. From the traditional perspective, power, located-in-the-individual, is but one of many potentially interesting variables worthy of scholarly attention. I am making the counter-argument that it is impossible to ignore power-located-in-discourse.

With this overview of the dialogism project in mind, let me turn to the second of my major points, a discussion of the utterance chain.

The Utterance Chain

In Bakhtin's (1986a) terms, an utterance is reconceptualized as an *utterance chain*, in which words uttered in a given moment are riddled with a multitude of competing discourses—something he (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 221) described as *contrapuntal* to invoke a musical metaphor of contrasting or counterpoint melodies played in conjunction. I'm a gardener, not a musician, so I developed a flower-like visual image of this utterance chain, which is presented in Figure 1 (Baxter, in press).

The flower's center is a given utterance and the 4 petals represent various types of discursive struggles (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) that potentially craft the utterance's meaning. Two of these links—the distal already-spoken and the distal not-yet-spoken—frame relating as an instance of cultural communication, and I will turn my attention here first by way of addressing the false binary that our field often reinforces between the public sphere and the private sphere. The position I am articulating today is that public life and private life infiltrate one another and in so doing constitute the meaning of both. In addressing the two distal links in the utterance chain, I am emphasizing that relating is a deeply sociocultural process.

The Distal Already-Spoken
Some dialogic echoes are from already-spoken utterances by cultural members other than the members of a given relationship. Bakhtin (1986a) referred to such utterances as already spoken "cultural communication" (p. 93). Rare indeed, claimed Bakhtin, are moments in which speakers are "biblical Adams, dealing only with virgin and still unnamed objects, giving them names for the first time" (p. 93).

Figure 1. The utterance chain
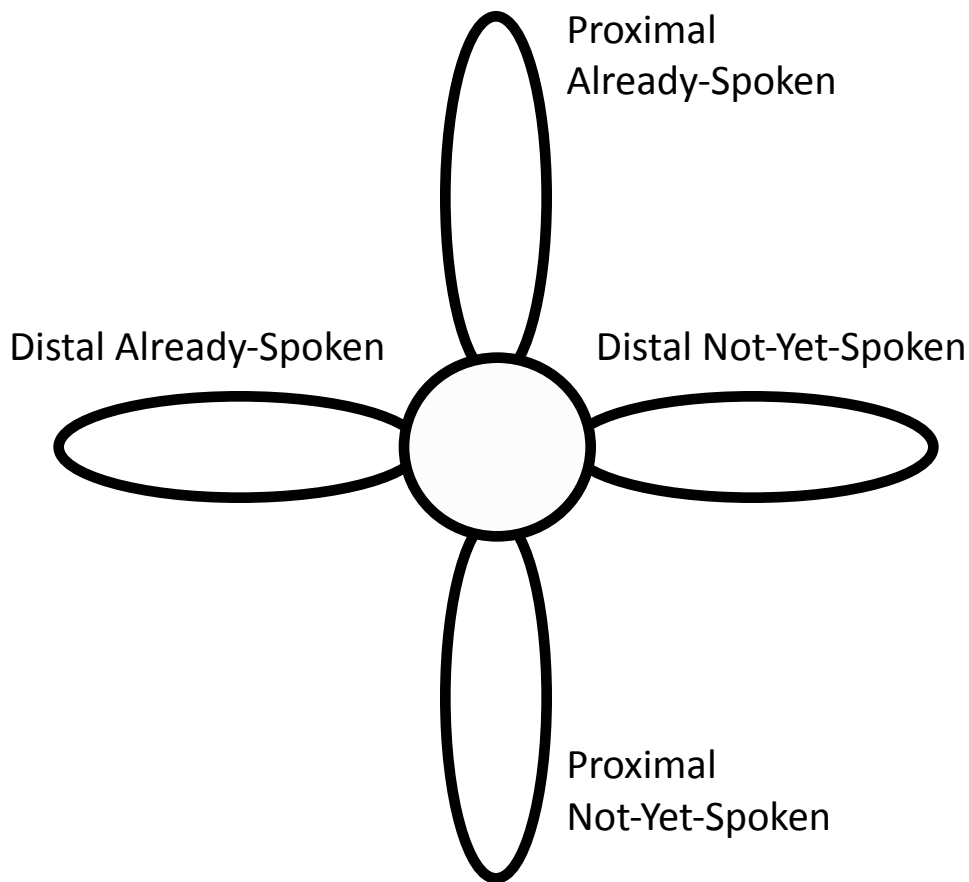
We enter an utterance stream already embedded in a culture that long ago named objects and developed discourses.

Contrary to the traditional view of culture as a unitary and coherent system, many contemporary theorists of culture "take cultural disjunctures and contradictions largely for granted" (Swidler, 2001, p. 12). Culture is thus a fragmented dynamic system, riddled with competing voices. These distal already-spoken discourses are ever-present in all that we do as social beings. And, of course, cultural communication, like all communication, is constantly in motion, as utterances in the moment function to reconstitute "culture," perhaps reproducing it but also opening space for its systems of meaning to change and evolve.

Let's take a simple example to illustrate how culture speaks in interpersonal relating. Imagine a young adult woman describing a new romantic relationship in this way to her best friend: "We had great chemistry right away and we're spending a lot of time together, I guess, but I want to take it kind of slowly to make sure it's the real thing. I don't want to be hurt again. We're not going public yet, but you'll be the first to know anything." Many different cultural discourses inflect this utterance to make it understandable to the friend (and to us). The discourse of romanticism that circulates in mainstream American society makes understandable the description of "great chemistry" and "the real thing." The competing discourse of rationality helps make intelligible the efforts by the speaker to proceed "kind of slowly." The discourse of individualism provides the backdrop against which the friend is

positioned to understand the speaker's expressed desire to protect herself from hurt, which competes with the discourse of community through which the friend can understand the meaning of spending "a lot of time together." A discourse of privacy renders sensical this person's statement that they're not ready to go public, yet it competes with the declaration that the hearer will be the first to know, comprehensible to us from a discourse of expression probably reflecting a discourse of friendship in which parties are expected to disclose their secrets to one another. Considered as a whole, the speaker's utterance displays discursive struggle, most clearly marked by the use of "but" and the qualifiers "I guess" and "kind of."
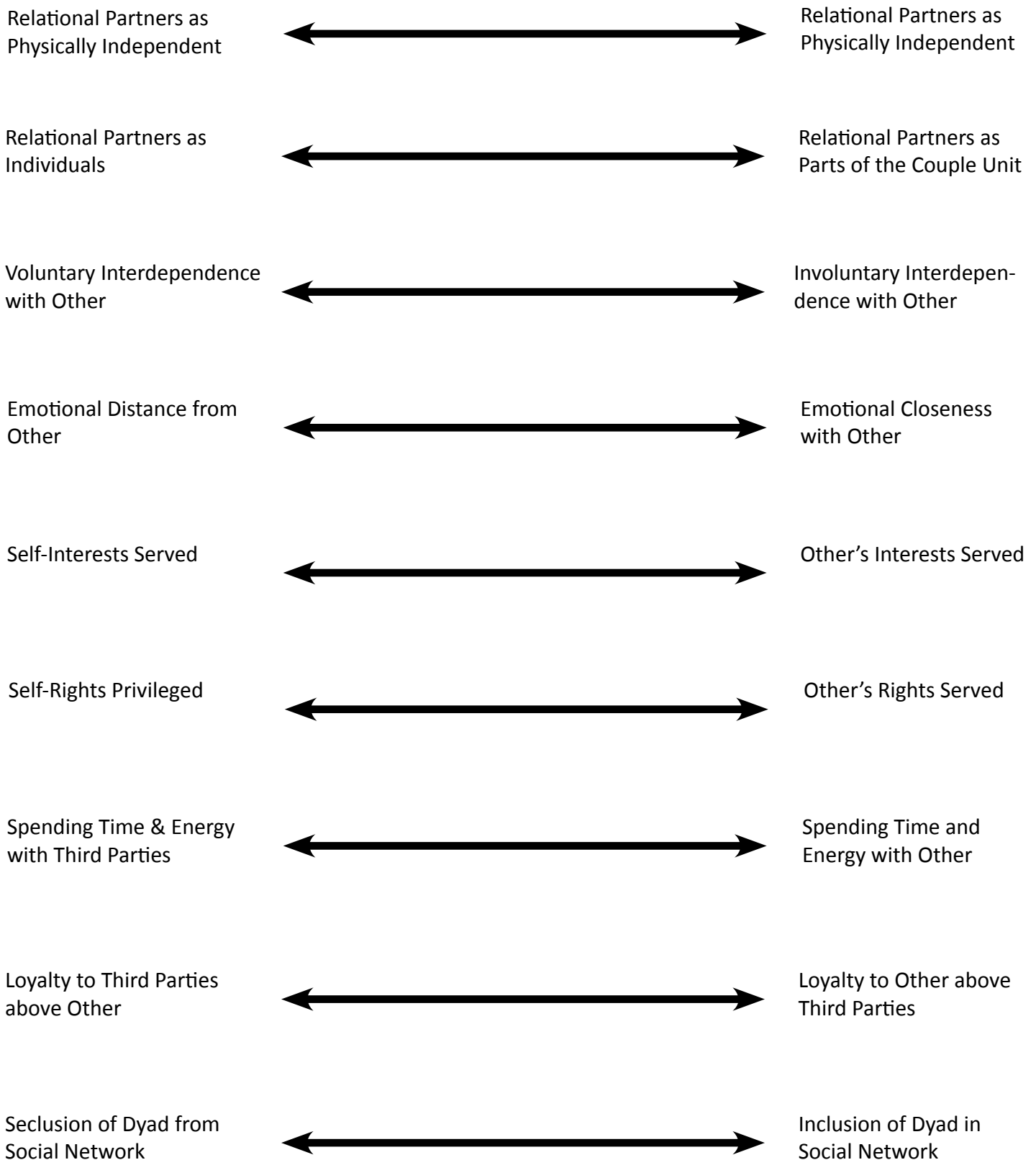
RDT-informed research keeps stumbling across two broad discursive struggles—Integration and Expression—and I want to spend a bit more time on each of these. I think the salience of these struggles in the research reflects their omnipresence as key fault lines in the American cultural landscape. First, the discursive struggle of Integration—aka *Autonomy/Connection*, *Independence/Interdependence*, *Separation/Integration*, *Seclusion/Inclusion*—is the competition between cultural discourses of individualism and community. Robert Bellah and his colleagues (1985) regarded the discourse of individualism as the "first language" of Americans, who speak in more muted ways in the "second language" of community (p. 20). It is thus hardly surprising to hear the discursive clash of these two systems of meaning when people talk their relational identities into existence—both in conversations between the relational partners and in conversations with third parties (including interviewers). In the example I just presented, we saw both of these discourses at play.

My reading of the research (Baxter, in press) suggests nine different radiants of meaning in the discursive struggle of individualism and community, which I have summarized in Figure 2.

It is important for scholars to attend to these radiants, for they are localized variations in meaning-making, and the analytic devil, as we know, always sits in the details. I cannot elaborate in this venue on all nine of these radiants but will illustrate what this struggle looks like through an example of one of the radiants: self-interests vs. other-interests.

In some dialectically-informed research, the discursive struggle of individualism and community is evident in a radiant of meaning surrounding priority to one's own self-interests as opposed to giving priority to the partner's interests. An example of this radiant of meaning comes from a study colleagues and I (Baxter, Hirokawa, Lowe, Nathan, & Pearce, 2004) conducted among a population of low-income, rural Iowan women in their decision-making surround alcohol consumption during pregnancy. These women were socialized to a cultural discourse of individualism that values individual choice in how to think and act, including a pregnant woman's decision about whether to drink alcohol. The discourse of individualism underscores self-interest, granting a pregnant woman easy justification of her choice to drink during her pregnancy because of the benefits it provides to her (e.g., a release from her problems). Competing with the discourse of individualism is a discourse of responsible motherhood, grounded in the broader cultural discourse of community. According to the discourse of responsible motherhood, motherhood begins with the pregnancy. With motherhood comes the moral obligation and responsibility to

Figure 2. Radiants of meaning in struggle of integration

Relational Partners as Physically Independent	⟷	Relational Partners as Physically Independent
Relational Partners as Individuals	⟷	Relational Partners as Parts of the Couple Unit
Voluntary Interdependence with Other	⟷	Involuntary Interdependence with Other
Emotional Distance from Other	⟷	Emotional Closeness with Other
Self-Interests Served	⟷	Other's Interests Served
Self-Rights Privileged	⟷	Other's Rights Served
Spending Time & Energy with Third Parties	⟷	Spending Time and Energy with Other
Loyalty to Third Parties above Other	⟷	Loyalty to Other above Third Parties
Seclusion of Dyad from Social Network	⟷	Inclusion of Dyad in Social Network

place the fetus's needs as primary. A mother who fails to do everything possible to protect her unborn baby from risks (e.g., fetal alcohol syndrome) is being selfish and irresponsible. These two discourses can be heard in this utterance from a 35-year old woman who talked of "finish[ing] off a 12-pack or a 16-pack" during a single sitting in her early pregnancy as a way to escape the stresses of her life. As her utterance continued to unfold, she dethroned the discourse of individualism and shifted to the discourse of responsible motherhood:

> With the drinking—there's smaller birth weights and slower development [for the baby]—I was very terrified of what I'd already done. It was my worst fear. I felt like such a bad person. . . . I think it's very selfish. You know, I don't think you're thinking of the baby inside of you and what it could be doing to them and what's going on. . . If you're going to be a mother, you've got to put the baby first at all costs. (p. 239)
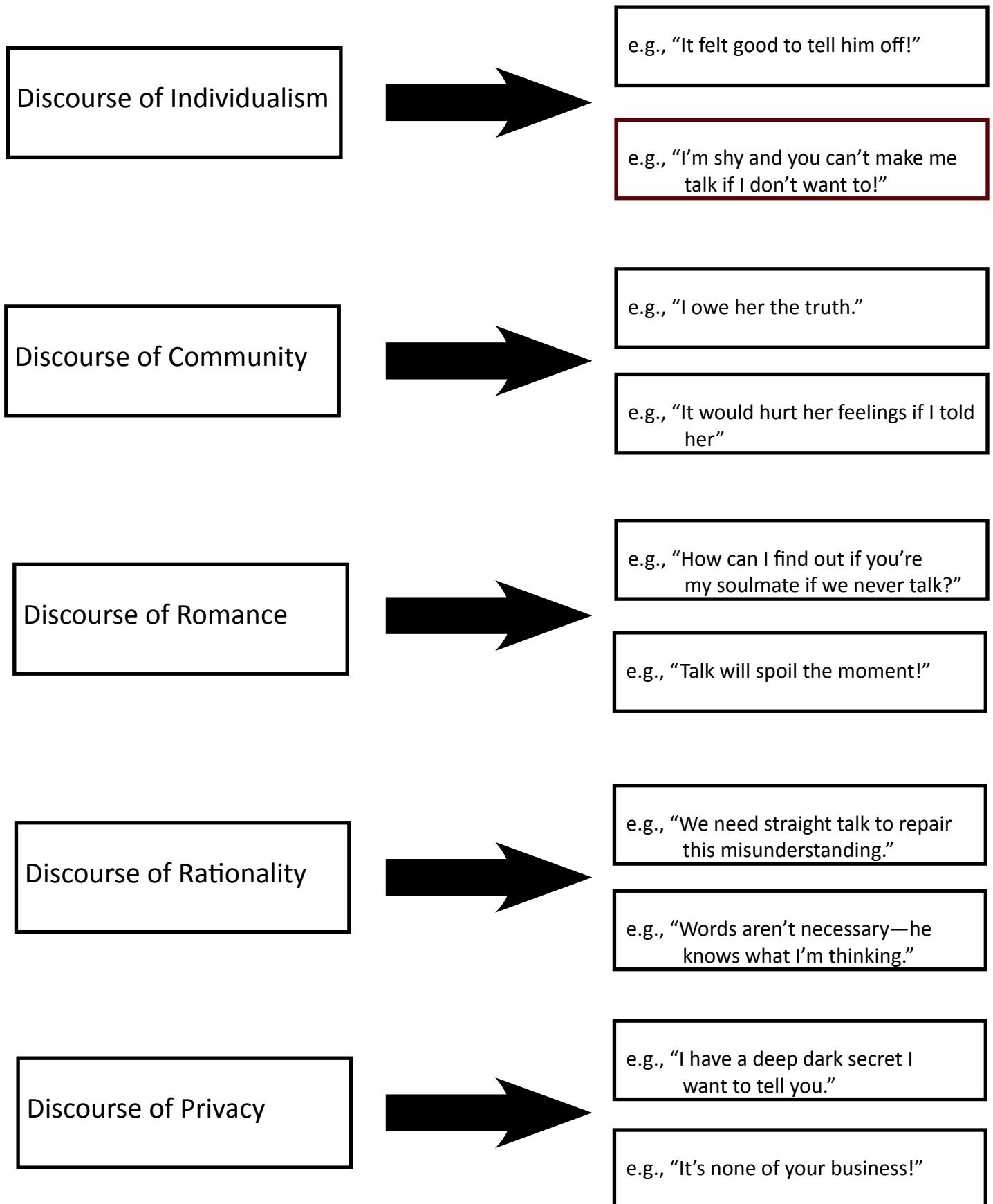
This woman placed these discourses into play through a temporal sequencing in which self-interests captured her past construction of "motherhood" whereas other-interests reflects her present construction of what it means to be a mother.

The second discursive struggle that keeps popping up in the research is that of Expression (aka *Openness/Closedness*; *Expression/Nonexpression*; *Candor/Discretion*; *Disclosure/Privacy*). Parties grapple with competing discourses that inform the meaning of their expressive and nonexpressive acts. I begin my comments on this discursive struggle by reminding us of Clifford Geertz's (1973) classic distinction between a twitch and a wink. Behaviorally, these appear the same. But at the level of meaning, they are wildly different. While the wink is a meaningful communicative gesture of a conspiratorial nature, a twitch is meaningful merely as an involuntary movement. Similarly, the discursive struggle of expression is about the meanings we construct for being open or being informationally closed, not the behaviors of openness and closedness, per se.

When a communicator refrains from or enacts expression, the meaning of this act can vary. My review of existing RDT-informed research (Baxter, in press) suggests that five different cultural discourses can be implicated, in various combinations of interplay, in rendering (non)expression meaningful, and Figure 3 illustrates each of them.

These discourses provide different framings for our interpretations of what it means to express or refrain from expressing. In this venue, I cannot elaborate on how each of these discourses renders intelligible acts of expression of nonexpression, but let me illustrate the broader point by drawing from the study of communication and drinking among pregnant women that I just discussed (Baxter, Hirokawa et al., 2004). One woman told us that although she doesn't think it's appropriate for a pregnant woman to drink, she would never say anything to the woman: "It's none of my business unless they ask" (p. 238). This woman's utterance is sensical to us through the discursive lens of individualism: It's the pregnant woman's right to do whatever she pleases, and one is obligated to respect the choices of others by refraining from comment. A different meaning was constructed of nonexpression by another woman in the same study, whose comments are sensical to us through a discourse of community: "Nobody's actually going right up to that pregnant woman and saying, you know, 'That's not good for you.' I don't think people really

Figure 3. Discourses at play in the struggle of expression

| Discourse of Individualism | → | e.g., "It felt good to tell him off!" |
| | | e.g., "I'm shy and you can't make me talk if I don't want to!" |

| Discourse of Community | → | e.g., "I owe her the truth." |
| | | e.g., "It would hurt her feelings if I told her" |

| Discourse of Romance | → | e.g., "How can I find out if you're my soulmate if we never talk?" |
| | | e.g., "Talk will spoil the moment!" |

| Discourse of Rationality | → | e.g., "We need straight talk to repair this misunderstanding." |
| | | e.g., "Words aren't necessary—he knows what I'm thinking." |

| Discourse of Privacy | → | e.g., "I have a deep dark secret I want to tell you." |
| | | e.g., "It's none of your business!" |

care. . . not to go up and help 'em out" (p. 239). This woman is making an evaluative judgment about silence as an act of uncaring, something we understand within the discourse of community. These two meanings of nonexpression are quite different, although at the behavioral level they are manifested the same way—silence.

Of course, these alternative meanings for (non)expression are in competition: in a given instance, should a woman speak up when she sees a pregnant woman drinking (thus caring) or should she keep quiet (thus being respectful of the woman's right to make her own decisions)? Our sample of women had a complex calculus for how they coped with these competing discourses. If their relationship with a woman was strangerlike, they honored the rights discourse of individualism and didn't say anything. If they knew the woman, and felt a bond with her, they honored the caring discourse of community and spoke out, but not without giving a verbal nod to the competing discourse of individualism. As one woman said to us in her interview about what she would say to her pregnant sister if she were drinking: "I would say something, I would just let her know that it isn't good to drink while she is pregnant, but again, I would tell her it was, it is her choice, because it's her body" (Baxter, Hirokawa et al., 2004, p. 241).

A multitude of culturally-inflected discourses swirl in talk, but I hope I have given you a feel for what discursive struggle is about at this first metaphorical petal of the utterance chain. Let me turn next to the second petal: the distal-not-yet-spoken.

The Distal Not-Yet-Spoken
The distal not-yet-spoken petal involves the anticipation of normative evaluations that could be provided by possible future "listeners" who are not physically present when an utterance is voiced—what Bakhtin (1986b, p. 126) referred to as the *superaddressee*. Speakers anticipate the evaluations of the superaddressee and adapt their utterances so as to garner responsive approval. Any outgoing Presidential administration knows well the importance of the court of history, and relational parties attend, as well, to their own anticipated interpersonal courts of future judgment.

At the distal-not-yet-spoken petal in the utterance chain, discursive struggles usually emerge as variations of the struggle between competing discourses of the conventional and the ideal (aka *Conventionality/Uniqueness*; *Ideal/Real*). The conventional evaluates a given utterance against what is expected as normal or typical, whereas the ideal evaluates a given utterance against what could or should be—the moral "oughtness" of an utterance. Of course, what is conventional or ideal according to one discourse may be framed as unconventional or less than ideal according to an alternative system of meaning or even a fissure within a given discourse. Discourses of the conventional and the ideal are also deeply culturally-inflected, and thus the distal-not-yet-spoken petal is a second site of cultural communication as Bakhtin (1986a) understood that term.

Discursive struggles surrounding the "real family" nicely exemplify research that is centered in this link of the utterance chain. Despite demographic trends away from the nuclear-family household consisting of a married couple plus their biological children, the discourse of the nuclear family still captivates mainstream U.S. society as the idealization of the "real" family (Baxter et al., 2009). This idealization of the "real" family creates obvious discursive struggles in family forms that depart from

these idealized characteristics, for example, GBLT families, commuting marriages, or couples that are voluntarily child-free.

For example, in much of my work with Dawn Braithwaite on stepfamily communication (Baxter, Braithwaite, & Bryant, 2006; Baxter, Braithwaite, Bryant, & Wagner, 2004; Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006), we can hear the discourse of the "real" family as a basis for criticism and delegitimation of, and disappointment with, the stepfamily by its members. Consider this utterance by a 21-year old young man who was discussing his relationship with his stepfather, a presence in his life since he was 5 years old:

> Interviewer: Can you describe the most positive aspects of communication with your stepfather in the stepfamily?

> Participant: I would say the fact that he had a respect for me as a son, not just a stepson. He respected me, um, as far as realizing what was important to me....But at the same time, anytime I felt like he was taking too active a role. . .it was almost like I put a limit on what I wanted to hear from him. 'OK, you told me this, that's enough. I'm not going to listen anymore.' So, I think, that varies a lot from a real family, where, you know, you listen to your dad because that's your dad. (Baxter, Braithwaite et al., 2004, p. 459)

This young man's utterance reminds us of the powerful discourse of the "real family" that circulates at the same time that he ironically tells us about his quite positive relationship with his stepfather. The stepfather is appreciated because he doesn't treat his stepson as just a stepson; instead he is treated as a real son. At the same time, however, the young man tells of resisting "too active" a role from his stepfather because he wasn't his real dad. The young man and presumably his stepfather are caught between the discourse of the real family and an alternative discourse in which family is legitimated through bonds of affection and respect.

Our relating is always infiltrated with a myriad of anticipated judgments by outside others in our social worlds. In the interests of time, however, let me transition from the first two links of the utterance chain, both of which highlight the interpenetration of relating with societal-level cultural discourses, to the two links relevant to the relational culture (Wood, 1982), that is, the micro-culture created and sustained between the members of the relationship, whether a dyad or a family. The discourses at these two sites tend to be more idiosyncratic between the relating parties. In the proximal already-spoken, I focus on the discourses of relationship identity—how the parties construct an answer to the question "Who are we?" In the proximal-not-yet-spoken, I turn to discourses of self-identity—how the parties jointly construct discursive answers to the question "Who am I?" for each party. I'll turn first to the proximal already-spoken metaphorical petal of the utterance flower.

The Proximal Already-Spoken

Beginning with their second utterance, interacting parties have a history (Duck, 2002). When the relational past brushes up against the relational present, we have the proximal already-spoken. Relating parties ongoingly face the discursive incumbency (Pomerantz & Mandelbaum, 2005) of their relational identity carried over from prior utterances and encounters together and negotiate in the moment

whether and in what ways this relational identity will be reproduced or overturned in a new relational identity.

Relationship parties enact the incumbency of what kind of relationship they have built historically through a myriad of interactional practices including reliance on taken-for-granted common joint experiences, referencing a common social network, and explicitly communicating about the past through ritualizing, storytelling, and informal reminiscing (e.g., Baxter & Pittman, 2001; Planalp & Benson, 1992; Planalp, 1993). But the reproduction of the given relational system of meaning is inevitably in play with alternative possible relational identities. The potentiality for production, not just reproduction, is present in every new encounter between relationship partners; parties ongoingly construct the meaning of their relationship and through their adaptations in meaning they construct new relationship identities.

Taken as a whole, relational dialectics research that refers to this family of discursive struggles in relationship-level meanings employs a variety of labels, including the *Dialectic of Stability-Change*, *Predictability-Novelty*, *Certainty-Uncertainty*, *Given-New*, *Presence-Absence*, *Past-Present*, *Old-New*, and *Reproduction-Production*. Several studies have examined important life events in which a loss of some kind has been experienced by relating parties. This loss is constructed as a profound struggle in relational meanings between the "old" relational identity and the "new" relational identity.

Some losses are physical—the death of a parent/spouse whose social ghost infiltrates a new stepfamily or a new marriage (e.g., Bryant, 2006), or the death of a child who is kept symbolically alive in a family's communication (e.g., Toller, 2005). A different kind of meaning is constructed when loss has been experienced but without a physical death. Let me illustrate this point by talking about a study colleagues and I conducted (Baxter, Braithwaite, Golish, & Olson, 2002) on the marriages of older women whose husbands were residing in care facilities because of adult dementia, especially Alzheimer's disease. These wives told us that they longed for the presence of their "real" husbands—the husbands of their memory prior to the onset of the dementia. This old relational identity was a powerful one for these women, and they reported despondency, sadness, and frustration because of their new relationship status in "married widowhood" (Braithwaite, 2002). Evocative of the experiences of these married widows is this statement by one of our participants:

> He's. . . he's not. . . he's not my husband anymore. When you have Alzheimer's. . . he's just not the same person. . . . Married for 55 years, obviously I love him. But there's no closeness. . . because he just isn't the same person. . . . I try to remember interesting things to tell him and talk with him about, but you see, he doesn't know I'm his wife. (Baxter et al., 2002, p. 10)

On the one hand, the husband was physically present and the wife embraced the opportunity to visit him frequently and to attempt to interact with him as the husband she knew in their long-standing marriage. Yet, at the same time, the wife experienced her husband as emotionally, psychologically, and socially absent. These wives were caught in liminality between the relationship identity of an established marriage and the relationship identity of a marriage that was,

for all intents and purposes, absent. These women told us that this struggle of old and new relationship identities was most difficult for them to negotiate when they talked with their husbands. Thus, the discursive struggle of past and present identities was performed through a discursive struggle of expression. Wives talked of substantial uncertainty and frustration about information openness with their spouses. The wives believed that their husbands were saddened and upset when they talked about issues related to home and children; thus they framed discretion as a positive communicative practice that protected the best interests of the husband. At the same time, however, the wives reported that they often did share information with their husbands about home, children, and other personal matters as a way to "return" to their marriages.

I have illustrated this site of the utterance chain by emphasizing points of major upheaval and change in relationships—losses of one kind or another—but the discursive struggle of past and present relational identities is an ongoing motif in everyday relating, as well, as parties are always negotiating continuity and change in their relational identity. However, with my eye on the clock, let me turn to the last element of the utterance chain, the proximal not-yet-spoken—the discursive site where a speaker anticipates the partner's immediate response.

The Proximal Not-Yet-Spoken
At stake in the proximal not-yet-spoken is the construction of the self-identities of the relating parties. Contrary to the impression left by the self-disclosure literature that the self is a hermetically sealed entity that is merely shared or hidden from Other, a dialogic perspective regards the construction of self-identities as a joint enterprise. The communicative act is a profoundly social enterprise; when words are uttered, they are addressed <u>to</u> someone (addressivity) and that someone responds (answerability) (Bakhtin, 1990). The Other who is addressed and who answers is both similar to, yet different from, the speaker. Thus, from a dialogic perspective, the discursive dance of sameness and difference becomes central to the process of co-constructing the self-identities of the two parties.

Mainstream scholars of interpersonal communication have devoted substantial research energy toward the study of similarity. In this tradition, similarity has been restricted to prior similarity as an objective state rather than as a meaning that is co-constructed between relating parties (for useful reviews of extant interpersonal research, see Ah Yun, 2002; Baxter & West, 2003). Further, this research tends to position similarity as desirable, whereas difference is often framed as negative. From a dialogic perspective, we need to attend more fully to how relating parties communicatively construct their self-identities by making joint sense of their similarities and differences.

In two studies analyzing conversations between partners on the topic of their similarities and differences, colleagues and I (Baxter, Foley, & Thatcher, 2008; Baxter & West, 2003) first realized that the boundary between similarity and difference can be a fuzzy one in parties' joint sense-making. For example, two male friends talked of how similar they were in their musical tastes, only to go into great length about how much they argued about the merits of a particular song by a particular musical group. Thus, these categories of similarity and difference may be more fluid and complex than a tidy binary might suggest. Second, our participants talked of the multiplicity of meanings associated with their tango of

similarity-and-difference, a dance in which both similarity and difference were constructed as both positive and negative. I cannot do justice here to the full complexity of our findings, so let me address but one strand to our findings—the discursive construction of difference as both necessary and dangerous.

Difference was framed as necessary by our participants because of its potential for enabling individual growth (Baxter & West, 2003). Over and over, participants discussed how they learned and grew as individuals from one another's different personalities, interests, attitudes, backgrounds, and styles. As one pair expressed it,

> Party B: Your strengths are my weaknesses and my strengths are your weaknesses, so we kind of accent each other in a way that we have a lot to learn from each other. . . . It keeps me with an open mind, makes me more understanding of other people.

> Party A: I guess I came from a pretty narrow background. . . . That makes the relationship interesting, you know, experiencing a new person and new ideas, . . . and helps you to understand different things. (p. 507)

But difference was complicated, accompanied by dangers, especially the possibilities of conflict and communication difficulty more generally. Differences— of any kind—purportedly increased the likelihood of conflicts and arguments, which were framed negatively by the participants. Thus, difference took on complicated meanings for relationship parties.

Parties talked about their differences in ways that recognized their value but whose dangers warranted regulation or containment (Baxter et al., 2008). For example, in contrast to talk about similarities, differences often were contained through qualifying terms such as "a little bit," "occasionally," "somewhat." Their apprehensions about the dangers of their differences were frequently marked through nervous laughter and dysfluencies. In contrast to similarities, which were straightforwardly discussed, differences tended to be accompanied by justifying accounts as a way to make them appear normal.

The addressivity and answerability of talk underscores that parties must grapple with their simultaneous similarity and difference as they jointly craft self-identities. This petal of the utterance chain is where Bakhtin's dialogism project probably comes closest to other perspectives within the field of dialogic studies, for example the work of Martin Buber (for an overview of the various perspectives represented in dialogic studies, see Anderson, Baxter, & Cissna, 2004).
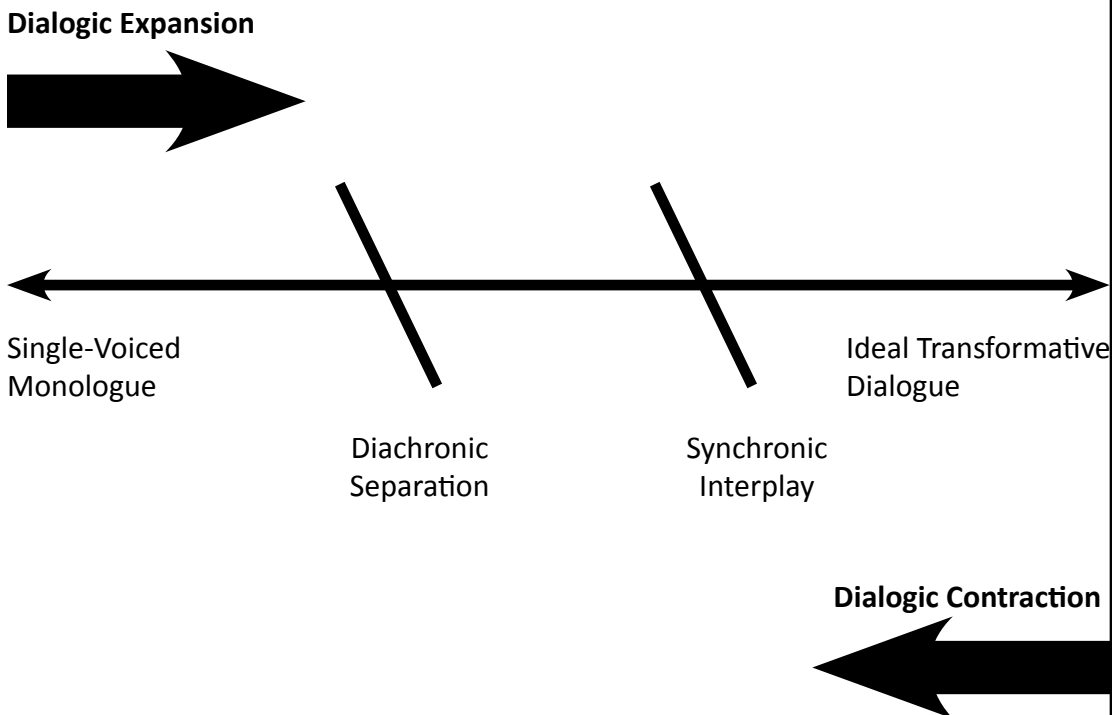
However brief, I have now concluded our grand tour of the utterance chain. Due to our limited time together, I have discussed research selectively in order to illustrate the major types of discursive struggles that are at stake in the business of relating. But what I haven't addressed yet is the process of struggle, and it is this third issue to which I turn next.

The Interplay of Competing Discourses

Existing RDT-informed research, including much of my own, tends to have a certain "black box" quality to it: Texts are gathered by a researcher and then mysteriously disappear into one side of the Research Black Box, only to emerge somewhat mysteriously from the other side of the box with the researcher's analysis. Too little attention has been given to what is going on inside the box—the process through which meaning is wrought from the interplay of discursive struggle in the texts' utterances.

As I discussed earlier, Bakhtin referred to this interplay of discourses as a centripetal-centrifugal struggle. Although his choice of terms points to power, it is fair to say that Bakhtin's treatment of power is underdeveloped. Certainly, the corpus of Bakhtin's work has an undercurrent of suspicion with respect to monologue—the dominance of a single discourse. Yet, his dialogism project is bereft of a politics in that it does not treat as a core intellectual problem the matter of how communication moves between more or less monologic tendencies. Let's see if we can illuminate what's going inside the "black box" of meaning-making. I will anchor my remarks in a continuum of dialogic interplay, which I present as Figure 4.

Figure 4. The continuum of dialogic interplay

Dialogic Expansion

Single-Voiced
Monologue

Diachronic
Separation

Synchronic
Interplay

Ideal Transformative
Dialogue

Dialogic Contraction

Let's start on the left endpoint of this continuum and work our way to the right.

Single-Voiced Monologue
The suspicion toward monologue is addressed in Bakhtin's (1981, 1984) discussions of single-voiced, or authoritative, discourse. Single-voiced discourse, as the term suggests, refers to the dominance of a single perspective or worldview: *monologue.*

Monologue is an authoritative discourse so dominant that other, competing discourses are silenced. Authoritative discourse, says Bakhtin, "demands our unconditional allegiance" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 343). The monologue of authoritative discourse is fused with tradition and authority that gives it taken-for-granted status. In Bakhtin's words, it is "not surrounded by an agitated and cacophonous dialogic life" (1981, p. 344), but rather functions with hard-edged finality as "Truth." It functions to "subvert, obscure, and deny" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 61) alternative discourses.

An example of monologue comes from a study on the stepfamily re-marriage ceremony from the perspective of stepchildren (Baxter et al., in press). The bottom line of this study is that stepchildren often talked of the ceremony as hollow. Our analysis suggested that this emptiness was rooted in its monologic quality, in which one discourse of marriage silenced alternative discourses. The monologue of the ceremony is nicely captured in this quotation from a 19-year old young man whose father had remarried three years prior to the interview:

> My brothers and I had, it didn't affect us, but, being there at the wedding and watching my dad get married, and it was, well, the only part that upset me was the pastor was talking about how life's events lead you up to this moment and how there's bumps in the road, and blah, blah, blah, but this is where you're supposed to be. And I got pissed, because I was like, was my mom the bump in the road? (#62)

Although this participant opened his utterance by saying he wasn't affected, he proceeded to describe his anger at how his family of origin—specifically his mother—was symbolically positioned. The discourse of romance that dominated this ceremony legitimated only the dyadic bond between the marrying couple, ignoring the husband's embeddedness in the family constructed in his prior marriage. This other family—symbolized through the mother—was reduced to a "bump" in the road of life, thereby delegitimized and erased. Over and over, the stepchildren in our study told us how they felt personally left out and forgotten in these re-marriage events.

Monologue, or single-voiced discourse, anchors the dialogic continuum. Everything to the right of this monologic anchor involves, to some extent, the interplay of at least two discourses. When an utterance chain moves right, it is heading in a *dialogically expansive* direction; and when it moves left, it is heading in a *dialogically contractive* direction (Martin & White, 2005; White, 2003). But what is meant by the term *interplay*? In dialogic expansion, competing discourses come into contact; they "enter into a semantic bond" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 189) in which the meaning of each is somehow impacted. The systems of meaning do not "exist side by side without intersecting" (Bakhtin, p. 189). Interpenetration is requisite to dialogue, because competing discourses must of necessity come into semantic contact with one another. With the litmus test of interpenetration in mind, let's move to the vast middle of the continuum, where I suspect much of interpersonal communication often resides.

The Vast Middle
The vast middle, between the endpoints of monologue and transformational dialogue, is a polemic place of ongoing discursive strife in which discourses jockey

with one another in the business of making meaning at the moment. Let me quickly address two different places on this continuum, for they capture two very different processes of discursive struggle.

Diachronic separation. The first of these, which I call *diachronic separation* (Baxter, in press), refers to communicative practices which, over time, are characterized by a shift with respect to which discourse is centered and which discourse is marginalized. The calculus employed by women in deciding whether to talk to a pregnant woman about her drinking (Baxter, Hirokawa et al., 2004), described earlier, illustrates diachronic separation. A sense of the ebb-and-flow quality of diachronic separation also can be found in a study on the meanings of the divorce decree for ex-spouses that several colleagues and I conducted (Schrodt, Baxter, McBride, Braithwaite, & Fine, 2006). The *divorce-decree-as-guide* framed the divorce decree as an informal rubric whose spirit with respect to child visitation and financial obligations was to be followed with flexibility depending on the immediate circumstances facing family members. By contrast, the *divorce-decree-as-legal-document* framed the decree as a binding document whose stipulations surrounding child visitation and financial obligations were to be followed absolutely. Many divorced pairs moved back and forth between these two systems of meaning of the divorce decree, depending on their frustrations at the moment. When one party appeared to be taking advantage of the spirit of the decree, a rationale was in place, from the perspective of the ex-partner, to legitimate a shift from the decree-as-guide discourse to the decree-as-legal-document. For example, one informant exhibited a great deal of patience with her ex-husband who traveled a lot and changed their child care arrangements quite often and with little warning. When her frustration built up, she invoked what she called the "use it or lose it" rule from the divorce decree to bring him back in line; she would then become more flexible again when he kept his changes to a more reasonable level. What we learned is that, over time, many ex-partners apparently shifted back and forth between these two meanings of the divorce decree.

Common to the practices of diachronic separation is a temporal <u>separation</u> of competing discourses, rather than their interpenetration (Baxter, 1988). Thus, if we use the litmus test of interplay I discussed earlier, diachronic separation is more limited in its dialogic potential than synchronic interplay, to which I turn next.

Synchronic interplay. In contrast to the diachronic process of separation are a number of synchronic processes which by definition implicate the co-occurrence of multiple discourses at a given point in time. Most of the examples I have quoted to you today have illustrated synchronic interplay in one form or another. Synchronic interplay has a myriad of discursive variations, but those variations can be described with reference to three underlying dimensions.

First, some polemic struggle is direct, in which the discourses are in each other's faces, so to speak, whereas other struggles are indirect, with discourses competing through what Bakhtin (1984, p. 196) artfully referred to as verbal "sideward glances" to one another. Second, some struggles are serious in tone, whereas others have a more playful quality, as for example, parody. Direct and serious struggles strike me as fairly straightforward, but let me illustrate both indirectness and playfulness with a short example. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin (1984) discussed the role of parody in accomplishing a radical skepticism toward a ridiculed, centripetal

system of meaning. Imagine someone who privileges the discourse of romance enacting a critical parody of a pragmatic discourse of love. Our speaker might say, in a tone indicating that it is to be understood as parody, "How do I love thee? Let me count the ways. . . . your car, your job, your income, your vacation days, your home, your retirement package. . . ." If executed successfully, the hearer will understand the deep ridicule directed at a rational, pragmatic approach to love. Clearly, parody is an indirect communicative act of playfulness that functions to unseat the discourse of rationality that can surround practical love.

Third, some struggles are antagonistic, in which each party's identity is aligned with a given discourse; this is interpersonal conflict as we commonly know it. Other struggles are nonantagonistic, in which all of the competing discourses are legitimated by a given speaker. For example, consider this nonantagonistic utterance by a focus-group participant on the subject of "dating": "I guess you could say we're dating—I like him and everything and we see each other pretty often—but we're not really 'dating'—I see other people, too." The *but* in this utterance marks a struggle between two different meanings of "dating." The first clause makes sense within a discourse of romanticism; the parties are attracted to each other and see each other frequently. The second clause makes sense within a discourse of individualism; the dating person doesn't want to be committed and thereby lose freedom of action (Chornet Roses, 2006). The speaker is negotiating between these two discourses, relying on the qualifier "I guess" to buy semantic wiggle room.

If we pursue dialogic expansion to its extreme, we end up at the other endpoint of the continuum of dialogic interplay: ideal transformative dialogue. Let me turn briefly to its description.

Ideal Transformative Dialogue
Idealized dialogue, to Bakhtin, is the interpenetration of equally legitimated discourses such that both are altered in a transformational manner. The polemicized, zero-sum flavor that characterizes the discursive struggle in the vast middle of the continuum is somehow transformed in the moment such that a transcendent meaning emerges, however fleeting.

An illustration of such a transformative moment comes from research Dawn Braithwaite and I have done on the renewal of marriage vows ceremony among long-time married couples (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2002; Braithwaite & Baxter, 1995). Several competing discourses of marriage circulate in mainstream U. S. culture: marriage as a private relationship versus marriage as a public institution; marriage as a stable institution versus marriage as a dynamic system; marriage as a convention versus marriage as a unique creation of two; marriage as a celebration of individualism versus marriage as a celebration of community. However, the participant accounts of their vow renewal ceremony were transformational in that the competition between these discourses was erased in a discursive seamlessness. For example, the seamlessness of marriage as a private relationship between two and a public relationship interdependent with others is nicely illustrated in this description of her renewal vows ceremony by a wife of 25 years:

> We didn't focus just on us. . . . We wanted to honor our families, so
> our pastor had Frank's mom stand and gave tribute to her. She and
> Frank's dad had been married 54 years. They gave tribute to my

mom and dad who were there; they had been married 54 years. We gave flowers to our families. And then we had a special song for all of our friends and family. . . . We gave special tribute to them, to the group. . . and shook hands with them and gave our love to them, saying 'thank you for being there to support us during the ups and downs.' And so it was kind of a tribute to everybody. (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2002, p. 103).

In making the ceremony a celebration of family and friends, in addition to a 25th anniversary celebration of the couple's marriage, the couple symbolically underscored the interdependence between the marriage and the social convoy of which it was a part. The boundary between marriage as a private-relationship-of-two and marriage-as-part-of-a-larger-social-cloth was erased.

Conclusion

What I have attempted to do in our short time together is reflect on my past work on RDT and where my thinking is going. I believe that RDT has helped to fill some conceptual holes in how we understand and study communication in relating that has application across various contexts. What is centrally at stake in RDT is the matter of dialogic creativity, that is, the interplay of stability and change in identity meaning systems—both relationship identities and individual identities. The dialogic spirit is suspicious of stability in its extreme form—monologue—for that represents the calcification of meaning where creativity is foreclosed. Closer to the dialogic spirit is the celebration of dialogic expansiveness, where multiple discourses interpenetrate, pregnant with potential for emergent meanings that have not been uttered before. Dialogic creativity has an element of surprise to it (Morson & Emerson, 1990), in which old discursive positions have potential to be shaken up—either by reversing the playing field with respect to which discursive position is centered or by transforming meaning more profoundly.

As I have reflected on my role as a theorist, I have noted elsewhere (Baxter, 2004) that theories are never stagnant and that their coherence is often best understood retrospectively. I have appreciated the roles of timing and serendipity in developing RDT and most of all I acknowledge and appreciate the role of my students and colleagues in helping me to develop this work. I invite you to help question it, refine it, and carry it into the future. Certainly, a theory's impact depends on whether other scholars find it heuristic in addressing their own research questions. From a dialogic perspective, theory growing takes place in the utterance chain between scholars, not in the actions of autonomous scholars.

Although Carroll Arnold was not a scholar of Bakhtin, I think his longstanding commitment to conversation across the humanistic and social scientific sides of the academic aisle exemplified dialogic creativity at its best. Let's carry that spirit forward in all of our scholarly endeavors.

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Robert Brubaker	J. Vernon Jensen	Father Leo Sands
Joseph Bulsys	Bonnie Johnson	Thomas Scheidel
Karlyn Kohrs Campbell	Christopher Johnstone	Patricia Schmidt
Noreen M. Carrocci	Henry Johnstone	Robert L. Scott
Ingeborg G. Chaly	Lynne Kelly	David Seibold
Kristin F. Chaudoin	Corwin P. King	Barbara Sharf
Sister Joan Chittister	Dennis R. Klinzing	Daniel Shurman
Timothy Y. Choy	Mark Knapp	Malcolm Sillars
Kenneth Cissna	Roberta L. Kosberg	Herbert Simons
Herman Cohen	Kathleen Kougl	Craig R. Smith
Celeste Condit	Manuel I. Kuhr	Jo Sprague
Martha Cooper	Robert Kully	Hermann Stelzner
E. Sam Cox	Reiko Kuramoto	Nathan P. Stucky
Ralph B. Culp	James M. Lahiff	Jerry Tarver
John Daly	Dale Leathers	Anita Taylor
Arlie Daniel	Beverly Whitaker Long	Robert Tiemens
Suzanne M. Daughton	Stephen Lucas	Kathleen J. Turner
Arthur F. Dauria	Jeanne Lutz	Richard Vatz
Robert Doolittle	Cheryl Malone	Paul A. Walwick
Nancy Dunbar	A. Jackson McCormack	Steven A. Ward
Robert Dunham	James McCroskey	Robert Welch
Margaret Eadie	Sherrie L. McNeeley	Molly Wertheimer
William Eadie	Martin Medhurst	Eugene White
Flo Beth Ehninger	Paul Messaris	Harold E. Wisner
Lois Einhorn	N. Edd Miller	James A. Wood
Donald Ellis	Ray Nadeau	Julia Wood
Keith Erickson	Mary Newman	Margaret Wood
Walter Fisher	Thomas Nilsen	David Zarefsky
Paul Friedman	Victoria O'Donnell	