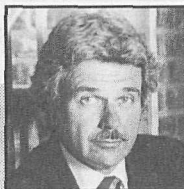


Spectra,  
January, 1991



## IS THE WORD LOVE TOO STRONG?

Mark L. Knapp

Presidential Address,

SCA Annual Meeting, November 3, 1990,

We have some ex-SCA Presidents in the audience. You *know* what I'm about to say is true. The rest of you will, I think, have little trouble believing it. The composition of this speech poses some formidable hurdles. The first breakthrough is when you abandon the hope that intense staring at a blank piece of paper will magically cause Acres of Diamonds or I Have A Dream to suddenly appear . . . with your personal touch, of course. Even harder is getting past the notion that even if Acres of Diamonds or I Have A Dream *did* appear, that your presentation of that speech before a group of issue-hardened SCA intellectuals would garner any greater impact than What I Did on My Summer Vacation. SCA Presidential Addresses are also handcuffed by the perception that we have such a heterogeneous audience that anything short of advocating cultural, sexual, intellectual, and educational diversity would be problematic. In the end, it is understandable that Presidents often solve these problems by retreating to the comfort and safety of their own area of study—metaphors, speech education, the impact of tv on our lives, or the support for freedom of speech. It is in the spirit of this tradition that I will spare you the potential difficulty of decoding a nonverbal speech. But I do want to talk to you

---

*"I do want to talk to you about relationships. Specifically, our relationships with SCA."*

---

about relationships. Specifically, our relationships with SCA.

As many of you know, I have been married twice. The first one lasted eleven years. I'm now in my fifteenth year in the second one. The longest relationship with my children is 24 years. But my relationship with SCA is now 28 years old—second only in length to my parents and siblings. In fact, my relationship with SCA exceeds the total number of years I've been single.

But it isn't because I study personal relationships or because I've had a lengthy relationship with SCA that I think one's relationship to his or her professional association is worthy of a Presidential statement.

It is because this relationship with SCA is so much a part of everything else we do professionally. I know, sometimes we act as if SCA is somehow more remote or less integral to our life than other associational bonds like our place of work. We can't forget, though, that whenever a person chooses to study or teach Speech Communication, he or she is inevitably brought into a relationship with SCA—whether they formally acknowledge this by membership or not. SCA is not some separate entity. It is us. The label itself is used to describe the associational aspects of our profes-

---

*"SCA is not some separate entity. It is us."*

---

sional lives—much like the term family identifies the connectedness of a certain group of people. Like families, SCA is comprised of good relationships and not-so-good relationships; and even some, who by their protestations, try to disavow any kinship. And there are those who, like our brother, Alan Fishler, had little awareness of his familial ties until he fell on *hard times* and his agonizing cries were heard. One's relationship with SCA goes well beyond mere membership.

There is no question that the last decade of this Century will test our profession as it has not been tested before. Many colleges, universities, high schools, and elementary schools are experiencing a newfound interest in communication skills and communication studies by students and administrators. At the same time, our nation is facing powerful changes in its economy which may profoundly affect the kind of growth we can expect. National polls tell us we are also entering a time when people are seeking greater commitment and community, but simultaneously we are supporting an increase in the options to which those commitments can be applied. The proliferation of journals and associations of late can only remind us of our own past and makes questions about our relationships

with SCA all the more salient. Will this marriage survive? Will we be happy? Are we going to stay together for the kids' sake even if the vitality of our relationship is gone?

To answer these questions, it seemed reasonable to turn to the literature on love. There I found several typologies which were useful as I reflected on different types of relationships with SCA. On the basis of my analysis, I have concluded that there are four fundamental or primary styles from which all other types of relationships with SCA are derived.

The first one I call TOUGH LOVE. I use this phrase because it is tough on SCA. SCA is asked to give a lot and doesn't get much in return. The primary motivation for this lover is self-fulfillment. They are often playful and charmingly competitive, but at the heart, they are a user. Make no mistake, SCA is a vehicle for accomplishing other, more important, goals. SCA is another conquest in a life made up of competitive challenges. These lovers report SCA to be a fairly easy mark. Don't blame me, goes the refrain, SCA allows itself to be used. Normally, these lovers are not cruel, but they can be devilish. It would not be unusual, for instance, for an Associate Professor with this orientation toward SCA-love to delight in trying to get a student membership. But accepting and performing the duties of Editor for an SCA publication, without membership in SCA, as has happened, strikes me as outright abuse. Since commitment to SCA is viewed only in terms of one's self-interests, exclusivity is another potential problem. In some cases, SCA represents only a trifling affair for an ICA spouse. There are demonstratable flurries of activity and contact in this relationship, but very little depth of feeling or involvement.

---

*"...it is tough on SCA. SCA is asked to give a lot and doesn't get much in return."*

---

They want to have sex immediately and regularly thereafter as long as distance can be maintained. We might expect to hear a Tough Lover say: "Since I'm only attending one day of the convention and staying with a friend at another hotel, you surely understand why I am not paying that hefty convention registration fee." These lovers are not generally critical—they're having too much fun. When they are critical, it is to create distance in situations they fear will involve them more significantly. And when these relationships sour, it would not be unexpected to hear these lovers say, "What did SCA ever do for me?" despite the apparent irony. Why does SCA put up with Tough Love? This certainly isn't the ideal lover, but compared to some other relationships it's had, SCA sees potential here. And sometimes, after having been used and seduced for a time, SCA manages to get this lover involved in a way neither of them ever expected.

The second type of love I call BUDDY LOVE. My buddy, SCA. For these lovers, having a relationship with SCA is something one *ought to do*. SCA is not more nor less important than many other aspects of their professional life. Normally, Buddy Lovers don't give a lot of thought to their relationship with SCA. There is never any question about whether to renew their membership and if they go to the annual convention, they are one of the first to register. They feel like they can always count on SCA just like SCA can count on them. SCA will get low rates at the convention hotel and they won't let their membership lapse. They like the stable and predictable aspects of SCA. SCA has always been there and always will. Rapid or radical change is not particularly valued. These relationships are caring, affectionate, and full of respect, but they are also passion-poor. Zestless. There is feeling, but only on those occasions when there is a clear and proximate threat. Generally, though, Buddies don't get too excited about the ups and downs of associational life. In all fairness, sometimes Buddies want a more intense relationship with SCA, but they don't sense any passion from SCA—for example, a person teaching in K-12 might legitimately say, "You say you really want me,

but I don't *feel* it." Some Buddies are active in the association—serving on committees and task forces—but genuinely surprised if SCA tries to intensify the relationship by asking for greater involvement. Others are more remote and uninvolved. These people are the great unknown in

*Normally, Buddy Lovers don't give a lot of thought to their relationship with SCA.*

SCA—the population everyone else believes is responsible for the crazy election results—whether it is for President or for the name change. The kind of love Buddies show—slow-growing, patient, stable—is of value in the long run. SCA, like a good friend, is forever . . . and so are Buddies. They look forward to being SCA Emeritus.

The third type of love I call, HOT LOVE. These lovers know only too well that you can fall in love with someone you know will cause you agony and suffering. They are controlled by the ups and downs of associational life. Their relationship is characterized by intense feelings. Passion is their standard-bearer. Conventions are a place to flourish. There are so many arenas for arousal. They are consumed with the issues impinging on their relationship. On the issue of changing the name of the association, these lovers see it as a pro choice and pro life issue; Alan Fishler and the *Chronicle* editor who published his article qualify as test cases for whether capital punishment will act as a deterrent; the fact that there is no Postmodernism Division in SCA nor a Caucus for Marginals and no Commission devoted to the use of animals in communication research are, for Hot Lovers, signs that the association has lost its capacity to love. Hot Lovers are specially equipped with the mind-body dexterity to vehemently decry the cost of their yearly SCA membership while simultaneously putting the equivalent amount of money on their Mastercard for a Chateaubriand for Two at Chez Jaques—which, mercifully, may only last 48 hours. Hot Lovers are also passionate about positive things. They can be the most ardent and articulate defenders of Communication Studies. But this can be a fragile relationship. It is vulnerable to untold numbers of unmet expectations and disappointments. It reminds me of my own Hot Love for SCA in the late 1960s when I wrote a letter to Bill Work threatening to cancel my SCA membership if *QJS* didn't start publishing something besides historical accounts of dead orators. The heat produced by these lovers is matched by the heat they expect from SCA. Affection and attention are needed urgently and intensely. Hot Love is not the sole province of new relationships. Old duffers and duffettes can and do engage in Hot Love with SCA. At its best, this kind of love creates professional excitement; at its worst, it is akin to an associational heroin.

The final kind of love I call the ALMOST TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE LOVE. These lovers, although not as plentiful as some may wish, do exist. Many are in this room today. More than with any other type of love, these lovers recognize the importance of the SCA relationship and make it a priority. They run for office, not because they are worried about winning glory or losing face, but because they know it is good for the relationship. Gerry Miller would no doubt balk at my describing his relationship with SCA in terms of love, but it is hard for me to understand his repeated

*We may find some diamonds to harvest and some great dreams to dream. Don't be afraid to love SCA.*

candidacies for SCA President in any other way. These lovers understand that loving SCA is greatly influenced by how much they love themselves in the work they do. SCA, then, becomes an extension of their own professional self—a way of protecting and preserving what is most dear to them. In this context, the willingness to expend effort without any promised reward; the willingness to stand by SCA in good times and bad; and the willingness to invest time, energy, and money—all seem to come naturally. It is the acknowledged interdependence of this relationship that makes these lovers special; they see that working for SCA works for them.

This doesn't mean that Almost Too Good To Be True Love is always pleasant. Frustration and fault-finding are seen as part of the relationship. But these lovers *are* intolerant of those who always seem to focus on the problems; they detest those who insist on demeaning our own professional talents in contrast to those in other disciplines. Almost Too Good To Be True Lovers also give SCA much needed doses of play and good humor. They freely acknowledge that we sometimes take ourselves far too seriously and do not hesitate to point out the comic elements of our behavior. These lovers are not afraid to communicate their love in explicit, intense, unqualified, repeated, and permanent ways.

While the preceding relationship types may or may not represent our reality, they do contain a lengthy list of individual behaviors which do have a reality for SCA and its relationships. It is not my purpose to argue for any single type of relationship. Associations, like individuals, flourish by having many different types of relationships. But the extent to which specific behaviors will be productive for a relationship with SCA is the extent to which SCA is worthy of love. Is SCA going to make a good lover?

I believe SCA is stronger, more self-assured, and more deserving of our love than it has been in the 28 years I have known it. Those of you who know me also know I can be very blunt about my opinions. It is no secret that in the past, I did not think it was in SCA's best interests to try to do so much for so many different populations. But the intimacy of my experience with SCA during the last few years has convinced me that this association has turned an important corner. I do believe that the SCA in the 1990s will, like no other period in its history, be able to attract and meet the needs of a diverse membership. In our current decade, which will surely be dubbed the Decade of Diversity, I believe SCA is positioning itself for the changes necessary to work effectively with diverse ideas and diverse populations.

Let me mention just a few of the ways SCA is committed to your future:

1. SCA is committed to balancing its successful efforts in Educational Services with services devoted specifically to communication research.
2. SCA is committed to organizing conferences for its members which are designed around a theme and provide for the kind of in-depth discussions of issues many feel are impossible to achieve at our annual conference.
3. SCA is committed to making this an organization the thousands of K-12 teachers will find attractive by providing practical seminars and supporting quality research in this area.
4. SCA is committed to becoming an effective advocate for the profession—with government agencies, with other associations, and with the public at large. As Mike Osborn's *Chronicle* article attested, our field has never been more vibrant, more scholarly, nor had more to offer. Those who don't see us this way are simply ignorant and undereducated and they need our help. Each of us can perform this job individually, but SCA also needs to be a major player in this process.
5. SCA is committed to building useful repositories of information about our field—whether this involves information which can be stored in computers in the national office or whether it involves supporting communication archives in other locations.
6. SCA is committed to becoming a useful partner with other communication associations to support and preserve our mutual best interests. Currently there is an effort to form an International Federation of Communication Associations. SCA can and will provide leadership in developments of this type.
7. And unlike some other residents of the Washington, D.C. area, SCA is committed to fiscal responsibility.

So, we've had our relationship talk. It is customary for the President to end his or her talk by appointing a committee to study the issue he or she didn't. But the subject of our relationship with SCA is not a matter for committee deliberation; it is a personal matter; a relationship matter. The word love has been thrown around a lot in our relationship talk today. I suppose some will think the word love is too strong a word for this kind of relationship, but from my perspective, it is exactly the kind of commitment we need to insure we both find happiness in the 21st Century. We may find some diamonds to harvest and some great dreams to dream. Don't be afraid to love SCA.