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## Interpersonal Communication

All of the principles that apply to public speaking can be used to analyze communication between two (2) people. *Inter* = between; between = two. Two people create messages, do audience analysis while creating and adapting those messages, and speak to one another. Nonverbal communication, message construction, self-awareness – all of these are common to all forms of communication analysis.

However, in interpersonal communication, both members of the dyad (two) have equal opportunities to speak and to listen because interpersonal communication analysis is primarily concerned with how the relationship between the communicators is defined and structured and developed. In public speaking, there is no developing relationship with the audience; speaker and audience are separate and do not engage in dialogue. Two people in conversation have much different roles. Plus, they have both a history and a future of speaking together that must be factored into any analysis. In other words, while there is some similarity between analyzing the verbal messages in a public speech and the messages in communication between two people, the goals of the speakers are very different.

Interpersonal communication focuses on the self-as-communicator – who we think we are, how we choose to

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present ourselves to others, and the choices we make about our verbal interactions. As we look at communication between two people, we can draw conclusions about how power is shared in a relationship and about how the members of the dyad act out their roles toward one another.

Speakers are expected to disclose information about themselves so that their relationship changes over time. Mark Knapp has developed a method of measuring how relationships escalate and de-escalate by examining both messages and behaviors.<sup>7</sup> He describes five steps that analyze relationship escalation and another five steps useful for examining a relationship that is deteriorating or de-escalating. Most of the work done in examining interpersonal relationship lies with maintaining relationships and how relationships change over time.

Another major area of analysis in interpersonal communication has to do with managing conflict. Because the members of a dyad are always negotiating their relationship verbally and nonverbally, conflict must be acknowledged and discussed. In public speaking, an audience member who does not agree with the speaker can leave before or after the speaker finishes delivering the

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<sup>7</sup> Knapp, M. L. 1984. *Interpersonal communication and human relationships*. Newton, Mass: Allyn & Bacon.

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message and there is no change in the relationship. There WAS no relationship. But the continuing discussion in a dyad is the focus of any analyst and student of oral communication.

The study of interpersonal communication may differ from the study of public speaking by covering topics such as intimacy and nonverbals, self-presentation and self-disclosure, compliance, conflict, relationship stages, and interpersonal competence in addition to creating and analyzing messages.