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CONTRIBUTIONS OF DECEPTION THEORY AND RELATIONAL DIALECTICS THEORY TO COMMUNICATING WITH ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract

This paper informs adolescentology in a kairological context through two communication theories: Deception Theory and Relational Dialectics Theory. Being the study of opportune moments in time and space, kairology aims to develop dispositions to seek opportune moments to implement robust and healthy ends. Deception theory espouses that in social communication, people seldom, if ever, tell or are capable of telling, the whole truth and nothing but the whole truth. When dependency becomes an issue, the dependent person or the person with less hegemony may be less likely to communicate in a full and open manner. Adolescents are usually less powerful than the adults who supervise them and may be more subject to the problems deception theory predicts. When communicating with adolescents, given the human shortcomings of people in any age group at detecting deception, it is recommended that a dialectic between the truth bias and suspicion bias be maintained in social communication with

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adolescents. According to relational dialectics theory, human relationships are undetermined processes involving tensions. Relational dialectics focuses on contradiction as its central concept. A contradiction entails the interplay between oppositions: for example, unity and division. The recognition that relationships with adolescents are subject to continual challenges can transform the relationship into a working one that is truthful rather than deceitful. Relational dialectics advances no claim about an ultimate state of communicative harmony or bliss; rather, it predicts, optimistically, beneficial adjustments to differences and oppositions.

Paper

Researchers have acknowledged the need to deal with negative as well as positive aspects of communication and human relations (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1998). To understand fully how people communicate means considering "how individuals cope with social interaction that is difficult, problematic, challenging, distressing, and disruptive." There is an "inherent need to investigate the bad as well as the good of interpersonal relationships" (p. vii). The dark and light sides of human communication need to be studied. Yet, the dark elements are frequently neglected and seldom integrated into a study of interpersonal relations. It is better to integrate the two areas and inquire into "the hidden and forbidden and the paradoxical and ironic elements" (Ibid) as well as the open, honest, and responsible elements (DeVito, 2004) of human communication.

In a sense, when awareness and sensitivity are applied in human communication, human communication becomes humane communication. Negative communication becomes positive communication. In fact, once humane intelligence is applied to communication circumstances, it can be argued that negatives disappear. In a way, negatives become transformed into positives. Unequivocally and inarguably, human communication and humane communication are not synonymous. The broader logical and empirical category is human communication; humane communication is regrettably the smaller logical and empirical category. Human communication entails all forms of relating between people while humane communication pertains to people trying to respect and help

one another – and, hopefully, doing so successfully. Consequently, two communication theories that have a negative association have been selected: deception theory and relational dialectics theory. Both communication theories, when applied humanely to human relations, have the potential to transfigure negative forms of relating into positive forms: that is, they can and often do transmute darkness into light. In the vernacular, these theories allow us to turn lemons into lemonade.

In this paper, there is an attempt to inform adolescentology in the context of kairology through the two communication theories of deception and relational dialectics. Being the study of opportune moments in time and space, kairology aims to develop dispositions to seek opportune moments to implement robust and healthy ends (Brera, 1995, p. 5; Brera, 1999, p. 10). Subsequently, in light of deception theory and relational dialectics theory, information from these communication theories will be utilized to enhance communication in a timely manner with adolescents. Adults should seek kairological moments, especially for improving communication with adolescents. Although kairological moments may not surface readily when communication is required, particularly when a significant revelation (Fiordo, 2001) is called for, opportune moments should still be pursued. Ideal conditions for contact and communication to occur with the greatest cognitive, emotional, and behavioral effects constitute productive goals.

PERSPECTIVES ON ADOLESCENCE AND ADOLESCENTS

While those in the age group ranging from 14 to 19 are focused on in this paper, adults with adolescent mentality are included here conceptually as well. Contrary to popular opinion, the nature of adolescence and its study remain controversial with one group of psychological theorists emphasizing the “discontinuity of adolescence” and another group underscoring the “consistency and transitional nature of adolescence.” The contrast here is between the so-called classical and empirical perspectives on adolescence: the classical view focusing on discontinuity over continuity and the empirical view focusing on continuity over discontinuity (Violato & Marini, 1989, p. 335).

In a study of mass media stereotypes of adolescents, Travis and Violato (1989) found that prospective and veteran teachers who were heavy users of mass media sources embraced stereotypes more completely than light users of mass media. However, both prospective and veteran teachers rely on popular culture and mass media for their understanding of youth. Remarkably, veteran teachers seem to accept mass media information about adolescents as much as prospective teachers (pp. 386-388). In a sense, both accept a worldview of adolescents according to journalists. This means they have journalized views of youth; they hold the journalistic perspective above their own daily experience. Their experience is mediated through mass media and mass mediators.

Violato and Wiley (1989) chronicled changing images of youth and adolescence in literature and media. Clearly, the images of youth vary among cultures and times. Adolescents can be used to symbolize renewal, honesty, and criticism of injustice; they can also embody folly – namely, flighty, silly, infatuated, and moody youth. Young people can also be seen as visionaries with moral purity. The diverse depictions themselves symbolize adolescence as a turbulent time: a time of sturm und drang or "storm and stress." The notion of storm and stress has ancient origins that were pioneered through G. Stanley Hall in 1904 (p. 351).

In an examination of the depiction of youth in English literature from Chaucer to Dickens, Violato and Wiley concluded that almost all the major authors with extensive readerships that were reviewed portrayed youth as a developmental stage in which sensuality, excess, passion, and turbulence prevail. Violato and Wiley challenge the storm and stress view of adolescence. They argue that Thomas More's view of adolescence holds youth as a time of "smooth transition to adulthood." This is a noteworthy exception to the literary perspectives on adolescence and coincides with contemporary empirical views of adolescence (p. 360).

Theories of human nature and adolescence are embroiled in their broad sociocultural milieu stereotyped through mass media, "perceptions of children, and influenced by economic and political ideologies. Furthermore, accounts of adolescents vary over time and fluctuate with economic conditions. During economic recessions,

psychological theories tend to emphasize "adolescent immaturity and emotional stability." In prosperous times, adolescents have been described as "mature and stable." In sum, "sociocultural, political, economic, and ideological factors influence perceptions of youth as do particular mass media stereotypes." If adolescence is a cultural artifact influenced by multiple factors, then the sociocultural context of adolescence must be examined for a "fuller understanding of how adolescence is conceived" (Ibid).

Shifting to the empirical perspective on adolescence, Travis and Violato (2001) suggest that certain simplifications might be attributed to adolescents as common grounds. They have a common name. Since they are delineated by a name, adolescents are framed and claimed by theorists as well as those in the culture at large. They share simplified yet common representations through lore, stereotypes, and mass media. Adolescents share the views others have of them in their respective societies despite what they may actually be. They share a reality of impressions through the semiotic mediation of culture (p. 44).

Adolescents also share a situation in which they are "placed at the margins of both childhood and adulthood." Faced with this situation, adolescents must deal with questions about how to live and behave. Without clear guidelines or with conflicting guidelines on how to live and behave, young people sometime appear to be "bewildered, confused and impatient." Adolescents may then manifest their frustrations with the "competing demands that are presented in their situation." Adolescents also share common tasks: coping with a maturing body, preparing for life apart from one's family, deciding what matters most in life, and deciding how to chose among compelling alternatives. Collisions of values are common to humanity. However, with inexperienced youth, spontaneity may give way to plans that take consequences into account. Compelling choices abound among adolescents. Frustration may result and with it the leaning of "inexperienced youth to be 'totalistic' and to be naïve about the availability of perfection" (p. 45).

Biological reproduction is perhaps the most obvious of qualities adolescents share. In contrast to youthful robustness is

maturation. In degree, adolescents are comparatively immature in sensibility and judgment. Due to their age of two decades, adolescents are inclined to "the errors of the inexperienced and ignorant." Oftentimes, but not always, young people "exaggerate their virtues (often betrayed by an unrestrained self-righteousness that can grate), manifest extreme behavior, and affect extravagant postures and appearances." Furthermore, their patterns of behavior need not be "very clear or predictable" (p. 45). Again, the lives of adolescents are lived between the "margins of childhood and adulthood" (p. 54).

Adolescent experience of life entails the bestowal of significance on lacunae (or "gaps, holes, ruptures or other indications of absence, incompleteness or insufficiency"). Adolescents will likely desire "experiences of worth." Since they "have a marginal status and share a marginal situation," adolescents yearn for experience they judge as "authentic and meaningful" while abhorring whatever is seen as "deficient in goodness, beauty or truth" (pp. 63-64). Subsequently, lacunae are likely to influence adolescents, and adolescents are likely to be open to influence resulting from perceived lacunae. Again, the adolescent situation entails a disposition formed from a "particular mix of inexperience, biological readiness, marginal status, managed experience and cultural confusion." The living disposition of adolescence constitutes a condition of "alert readiness to detect, in the experience of any situation, what will serve them well or ill in their primary project: to make something of themselves that is good, beautiful and true as seen in the light of their own (personal) understanding." As a result, adolescents are especially sensitive to the tensions created by lacunae and their desire to fill them (p. 64-65).

Pervading the adolescent experience is a conflict between two sets of values: the Apollonian values of a serious durable culture that teaches the best that has been thought, said, and done and the commercial values of popular culture that promotes common and mass consumption. What is durable conflicts routinely with what is commercial in society and in adolescents. The dialectic of the durable, serious culture and the popular, commercial culture can be observed and tested daily. The durable culture may not endure, or may at least be marginalized, due to the repetitive and pervasive power of the commercial culture. Of course, all are caught between these tensions,

but adolescents deal with more lacunae than those in childhood or adulthood. Hence, the dialectical tension is especially activating on them (pp. 74-75) sometimes turning them from the values of a serious culture to the values of a popular culture. A percentage of adults actually prefer the values of the voracious culture to the values of the sensible culture.

The comparisons, contrasts, and tensions between the serious set of cultural values and the commercial set of cultural values follow:

Serious Culture Values	versus	Commercial Culture Values
1. embraces and embodies		1. embraces and embodies
2. tradition and custom		2. freshness and newness
3. order		3. spontaneity
4. concision		4. expression
5. formality		5. informality
6. restraint		6. enthusiasm
7. modesty		7. immodesty
8. humility		8. pride
9. doubt		9. confidence
10. reflection		10. impulse
11. edification		11. entertainment

In other words, instruction can become mere amusement and activity. The durability of beauty, truth, and goodness become subordinate to what holds attention fleetingly. Lacunae are debased. Lesser values drive out greater values: fashion replaces substance, and disposable values dilute durable values. Learning serves a commercial and entertaining function more than an educational and enlightening function (p. 75). In the adolescent life bordering on “a receding childhood and an approaching adulthood,” young people search for lacunae in their situation, themselves, and in others significant to them. Their sensed and feared vulnerabilities become concealed in the whirligig of our marketed society. Whatever or whoever interferes with their pursuit of beauty, truth, and goodness invites derision and dismissal (pp. 77-78).

Interpreting Albert Bandura, Mitchell's (1986) rendition of adolescence complements that expressed by Travis and Violato. Echoing Bandura, Mitchell tells us that adolescents in North American society are systematically and systemically misperceived because of the following factors. Young people suffer from overinterpretation of superficial signs of conformity, mass media sensationalism, generalization from samples of deviant adolescents, overemphasis on the biological determination of heterosexual behavior, stage theories of development, and self-fulfilling prophecy (pp. 10-11). Mitchell adds that adolescents have a number of personality factors related to emotional and sexual needs. These needs produce tension in adolescents and those around them. Distinct from childhood and adulthood (perhaps, in degree, frequency, and intensity), these include the following needs: intimacy, belonging, dominance and submissiveness, curiosity and competence, passion and intensity, rebelliousness and negative identity (pp. 48-53).

Rendering a view of Hadley Cantril on the fundamental needs of adolescents, Mitchell advises that adolescents desire physical and psychological security. They want to protect what they have gained and secure grounds for advancing their interests. Adolescents require order and certainty in order to judge accurately consequences of actions or omitted actions; they strive to increase the "range and enrich the quality of their satisfaction." As creatures of hope, adolescents are "not genetically designed to resign themselves." That is, they resist fatalism and embrace idealism and futurism. Adolescents are able to make choices and desire to do so; they must have "freedom to exercise the choices they are capable of making." Adolescents desire to experience "their own identity and integrity" and a sense of "their own worth." They seek a "system of beliefs to which they can commit themselves." And, adolescents strive for certainty and assurance that their society offers them hope so that their "aspirations will be fulfilled" (pp. 166-168).

Although brief, the summary of the psychology of adolescence will have to suffice for the limited purposes of this paper. The contributions of deception theory and relational dialectics will now be elaborated regarding communicating with adolescents.

DECEPTION THEORY

Deception theory espouses that in social communication, people seldom, if ever, tell or are capable of telling, the whole truth and nothing but the whole truth (Fiordo, 1999). When dependency becomes an issue, the dependent person or the person with less hegemony may be less likely to communicate in a full and open manner. Adolescents are usually less powerful than the adults who supervise them and may be more subject to the problems deception theory predicts. As Travis and Violato (2001) pointed out, adolescents may have a conflict between humility and pride, doubt and confidence, or edification and entertainment since a parent (or adult) may value the serious culture values over the commercial culture values. To save face and protect themselves from punitive measures from the parent (or adult), adolescents may do the one but claim the other: that is, lie about their actions. The tensions of adolescents may manifest themselves in being prideful about their appearance or accomplishments but pretending to be humble, having doubts about going to college but feigning confidence to appease the parents, or claiming they went to church when they went to a movie.

In regard to lying, Buller and Burgoon (1996), Zuckerman and Driver (1985), Kalbfleisch (1992), and McCornack (1992) suggest that human beings do not detect lies very accurately. Verbal deceit involves falsification, concealment, and equivocation. Nonverbal deceit includes minimization, exaggeration, neutralization, and substitution. Lying has levels as well, and these differ in complexity and sophistication. Lies can also be classified from minor to major: white, humorous, altruistic, defensive, pathological, and psdeudologia fantastica (Ford, 2002). Pseudologia fantastica is an extreme form of pathological lying where fact and fiction become confused even for the deceiver (See, Fiordo, 1999).

In discussing lying as a predictable part of communication and social interaction, there is no attempt here to challenge a cultural truth bias: that is, a societal norm that prescribes telling the truth as a premise for the social contract. Nor is there an attempt to advance radical honesty generally: that is, that the ideal society is a society of people radically open to disclosure and self-disclosure under universal circumstances

(Morris, 1948; Fiordo, 1977). A truth bias is endorsed here as a wise and ethical premise for communicating and conducting life civilly in a democratic society (Andersen, 2003, pp. 11-14). Religious subcultures and therapeutic transactions of radical honesty exist in special communities, such as possibly among select members of Franciscan, Parsee, Baha'i, and Hasidic religious communities (Hopfe & Woodward, 2001; Buber, 1965) as well as in special interpersonal and small group therapies (Frankl, 1955; Perls, 1969; Rogers, 1951; Yalom, 1989). Moreover, there is no opposition here to people who choose radical honesty as a lifestyle. These are seen as options that should remain open to choice. The focus here is on the norm in North American and other world societies of a truth bias in a cultural context that admonishes people for deception yet knows equivocating, falsifying, and concealing are routine activities of some of its members.

With a truth bias, telling the truth is the normal expectation. Yet, although lying is a predictable activity, it is seen in a society with a truth bias as a deviation from the norm with some deviations being more justifiable than others: for example, lies to save a law-abiding person's life from a criminal. A suspicion or lie bias, apart from its daily use with special branches of such agencies as the police and military, plays a potentially beneficial role in everyday life in a society operating on the assumption of veracity. Burgoon and others (1995) define suspicion as a "state of doubt or distrust that is held without sufficient evidence or proof" (p. 164). Given this definition, the suspicion bias becomes a "mind-set located somewhere between truth and falsity" (Griffin, 2003, p. 103). As a matter of wisdom, communicators can cautiously proceed with one eye open; that is, they can assume an honesty bias that aims to deliver truth and proceed with veracity while maintaining a healthy aloofness that information may be incorrect or deceptive (Fiordo, 1990).

Buller and Burgoon (1996) list a number of propositions pertaining to interpersonal deception theory. Five noteworthy propositions of deception follow: 1) Deceivers make more strategic moves when communicating and leak more nonverbal cues than truth tellers; 2) As familiarity with one another increases, deceivers have an increase in fear of being detected, make more strategic moves, and have more

leakage; 3) Skilled deceivers appear more credible because their many strategic moves display less leakage than unskilled deceivers; 4) A respondent's accuracy in identifying deception decreases when interaction, the respondent's truth bias, and the deceiver's communication skills increase; and 5) When the deceptive conversation ends, the deceiver judges success on the basis of the respondent's final reaction and the deceiver's perception of lasting suspicion (Griffin, 2003. pp. 97-98; Heath & Bryant, 2000, pp. 241-246). Regrettably, no valid and reliable "Pinocchio" measures are available.

Deceit frequently suffers from leakage (or unwittingly revealing truth) resulting from a number of verbal and nonverbal factors: contradictions, inconsistencies, tone of voice, body movements, cognitive overload, expectancy violations, and others (Ekman & Friesen, 1969). Any culture that operates from a truth bias assumes veracity on the part of communicators as a norm. Although this assumption may be necessary and wise overall when compared to a culture that operates from a suspicion bias, the truth bias has communicative shortcomings. A deceiver has a sanctioned advantage when the truth bias prevails. When communicating with others when a truth bias prevails, it is advised to proceed in a reasonably suspicious manner since most people have trouble detecting deception. Communicators trained in deception may attain an estimated 65 percent accuracy at best in detecting deception. An estimate of, at best, 50 percent deception detection for most people is to be expected (Zuckerman & Driver, 1985).

In short, people in general lie to one another and can get away with it frequently; adolescents lie to one another and to adults and can get away with it often. Many parents hear a confession from a son or daughter ten years or more after an action they lied about to the surprise and even astonishment of the parents. For example, confessions such as: "I had sex for the first time when I was 12," "I smoked marijuana more than a hundred times by the time I was 16," "I drove your car when you were at work when I was 13 and 14," "I had my brother do the math part of the ACT for me," and so on. Although parents may have had suspicions, they may never have caught their beloved adolescents in the act of lying or in the act of misconduct. All

of us have the potential and power to fool another. The aware communicator may proceed truthfully yet with a suspicion bias without necessarily becoming a hostile interrogator or an oppressive investigator with others in general and adolescents in particular.

RELATIONAL DIALECTICS THEORY

When communicating with adolescents, given the human shortcomings of people in any age group at detecting deception, it is recommended that a dialectic between the truth bias and a suspicion bias be maintained in social communication between adults and adolescents. Relational dialectics theory (Bakhtin, 1981; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) maintains that human relationships are not fixed and stable; rather, they are undetermined processes involving ongoing tensions, struggles, and conflicts. Instead of the process being orderly, neat, and permanent, the process is messy, untidy, and fluctuating. Flux and continual change reign supreme. According to Baxter and Montgomery (1996), the premise for human relations and communication is that "relationships are organized around the dynamic interplay of opposing tendencies as they are enacted in interaction" (p. 6). People do not live happily ever after; instead, they struggle on into their future, hopefully with a smile born out of an awareness of conflict as a real and potentially benign part of relational life.

Relational dialectics focuses on contradiction as its central concept. A contradiction entails the "dynamic interplay between unified oppositions" (p. 8): for example, unity and negation, fusion and fission, centralizing and decentralizing, and centripetal and centrifugal forces. The recognition that relationships with adolescents are subject to vacillations, oppositions, and contradictions can transform the relationship into one that is realistic, truthful, and manageable rather than one that is unrealistic, deceitful, and unmanageable. To expect and accept flux and differences in relating to adolescents allows reasonable strategies to guide the communication. Relational dialectics theory entails people pushing and pulling in different and opposite directions. Communication in relationships involves an interpersonal norm of dynamic tensions. There is little sense in denying the dynamic and much sense in flowing with the reality of these tensions (Griffin, 2003, pp. 158-159). When relating to others, there is a sense of being

strapped, sometimes merrily, to each other. People push and pull one another in diverse directions like children at an amusement park wanting to take a parent in five directions at once.

Baxter and Montgomery (1996) explain that relational partners experience dialectical tensions that may be classified, for convenience, as private and public. There is an private dialectic that occurs within the relationship and a public dialectic that occurs between relational partners and their community. The polarized concepts tied to the private dialectic include connectedness vs. autonomy, certainty vs. uncertainty, and openness vs. protection. The polarized concepts tied to the public dialectic include inclusion vs. seclusion, predictability vs. novelty, and revelation vs. concealment. People pull and push one another in each direction more or less at the same time. The tug-of-war continues in degree indefinitely and permanently.

With respect to adolescents, a son or daughter may demonstrate an ambivalence to be close yet far from parents, independent yet dependent. Adolescents may wish to have predictability yet novelty in their relations with their friends. And, they may strive to juggle being transparent yet camouflaged with their loved ones. In relation to their community, adolescents may want inclusion in one peer group that excludes them from others. They may want to be comfortable through conformity with school friends yet desire to remain special and individual. And, adolescents may crave to publicize some action they have taken yet choose concealment due to potential repercussions from the disclosure (Griffin, 2003, pp. 160-164; West & Turner, 2003, pp.209-215). In short, contradiction and change are predictably essential parts of communication and human relations (West & Turner, 2003, p. 206). Relational dialectics theory constitutes a key to unraveling the complexity of contradiction and opposition in dialogic communication.

Control of a changing situation is more manageable when communicators are disposed to a kaleidoscope of changing behavior and prepare to adjust to the ever-changing transactions. Communicators have a better chance of adjusting if they prepare for actions in general on the part of others and disagreement in general on the part of others. Actions tend to be faster than reactions. Therefore,

those disposed to conflicting and contradictory behavior and human interaction have an advantage in implementing communication over those disposed to expect no tension or opposition (Fiordo, 2004. pp. 15-30).

Relational dialectics advances no claim about an ultimate state of communicative harmony or bliss; rather, it predicts, optimistically, that beneficial adjustments to differences and oppositions can be attained. What may be productive in relational dialectics is the ability of the communicators to embrace disagreements and conflicts openly in order to be interpersonally productive. Satisfactory human relations and communication may then be an epiphenomenon of relational dialectics with adolescents. In short, adults who relate wisely to adolescents will learn to proceed in a sane manner with respect to communication conflict and breakdowns. Handling opposition adequately and beneficially will likely elevate the relationships of the communicators involved (Littlejohn, 2005, pp. 199-202; Griffin, 2003, pp. 157-167).

KAIROLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

In light of the complexities of communicating with those living between childhood and adulthood (and of course, psychologically, not all human beings transcend the marginal state of adolescence), kairology suggests a watchfulness to make a point when circumstances and minds are most receptive. When adolescents are experiencing a value conflict, adults may watch for the proper time and place to assist them in moving past the oppositions. Premature communication intervention can pose communication risks that are as unhelpful or as harmful as tardy communication intervention, thereby increasing the danger of a communication effort becoming a crisis. On occasion, the most suitable circumstances can conceivably be the here and now in any given situation. More commonly, the time is right but not the place or vice-versa. As helpful communicators with adolescents, the strategic and proper staging of a revelation or position with respect to adolescents can be effective and even life-saving.

If there is a need on the part of the adolescent for the lacunae of beauty and truth to be filled, the adult with an answer to these needs may take advantage of an opportune time and place to show the adolescent the

way through the quandary. Sensitivity to context overall is crucial to effective communication; sensitivity to the kairological moment would provide an additional advantage to sincere communication that occurs between adolescents and adults. Without consideration of the kairological moment, communicators run the minimal risk of trying to dance the tango gracefully while wearing combat boots. At best, the art of comedy will replace the art of the dance. When applied to communication, the kairological technique is one of the seamless weave, an art that when done well is effective although invisible.

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