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Communication and Conflict Management in Romantic Relationships

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Communication and Conflict Management in Romantic Relationships

HDEV 400B

Dr. Weisskirch

Communication and Conflict Management in Romantic Relationships

Introduction

Many college students and young adults are in more serious romantic relationships now in their young adult lives than when they were at a younger age. Therefore, it is useful for them to have the skills to maintain a healthy relationship such as communication skills. To address this issue, I will be conducting an online training of good communication skills in romantic relationships for CSUMB undergraduate students in Seaside, California.

Need Statement

College students and young adults are in a stage in their lives where they are entering into romantic relationships and may want to maintain a healthy and strong long-term romantic relationship. Although some may believe that there is a hookup culture in college, where individuals have short-term sexual relationships, a recent study by the American Psychological Association found that the percentage of college students who actually preferred a traditional relationship to a hook up were between 63 and 83 percent (Khazan, 2014). In addition, although college students believed that 90 percent of students in college had been involved in hooking up more than two times, only 37 percent of students had hooked up (Hovan, 2016). Therefore it is far more likely that emerging adults will be in stable longer term relationships and to maintain those relationships, they need relationships skills.

Successful relationships require good community communication. Being in any type of relationship, be it a romantic relationship or just a friendship, communication is a very important aspect. Communication is the foundation of any relationship and people can learn how to communicate more effectively. It is better for an individual or a couple to act early if they are

having difficulties. Being able to communicate effectively can help stop regularly occurring

arguments or conflicts from happening. John Gottman uses the metaphor of the Four Horsemen

of the Apocalypse to depict how bad communication styles can predict the end of a relationship.

These four horsemen are criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling. With criticism,

the person is attacking the other person's character instead of actually focusing on the real

problem. When a person criticise they focus more on what they don't like about the person. It

distracts from the core purpose of the argument. The second is contempt which is worse than

criticism because contempt is used to make the other person feel despised or worthless. It is a

mean way of talking to someone and it is fueled by negative thoughts about the partner. Lisitsa

(2013) says that "most importantly, contempt is the single greatest predictor of divorce" (para.

10). Defensiveness is the third horseman and it is typically a response to criticism. It is a

common thing to do in an argument because nobody really wants do have the blame on

themselves so they usually try to turn it around on the other person. They try to make it the other

person's fault instead of their own. The last horseman is stonewalling which is usually a

response to contempt. The person who stonewalls withdraws from the interaction or argument

and stops listening. These people just try to escape the situation by ignoring the other person.

Lisitsa (2013) also gives antidotes to these problems that can help with the conflicts in

relationships. It is normal to have conflict but how couples go around them can make a

difference. For the first horsemen, criticism, instead of verbally attacking the other person,

individuals should try talking about their feelings using "I" statements. It takes the blame away

from the other person and helps to solve the actual issue. Before an individual uses contempt

and insult the other person, they should remind themselves of their partner's positive qualities.

Sometimes being angry at someone else can blind a person from someone's actual character so they attack them instead of working with them. With defensiveness, instead of turning the blame on the other person, first listen to what they are saying and accept the partner's perspective. People do not like taking responsibility for negative actions but when they do it helps to resolve the situation. Lastly, both people should take a break from the situation if it is getting too heated and come back after both people have calmed down. Both individuals need to let their bodies physiologically recuperate.

Given that people in general make mistakes and get mad sometimes, it is important do keep these things in mind when in an argument with a romantic partner. Using these antidotes instead of using the four horsemen will help to keep a relationship strong. It is especially important for college students at this time to remember these tips because they have a lot of other things going on in their lives like school and work. Stress from these things can build tension in relationships sometimes but with the right tools, the relationship can still strive and grow stronger.

<div align="center">Theory Application</div>

College students and young adults are in the fifth and sixth stages of Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development. Erikson calls the fifth stage Identity vs. Role Confusion, where adolescents are looking at the future to their careers, relationships, families, etc. The individuals, at the point in life, are trying to find their identity and also figure out the roles they will play in adulthood. The sixth stage, Intimacy vs. Isolation, is more focused on romantic relationships. It is important to complete the Identity vs. Role Confusion stage first before pursuing Intimacy vs. Isolation as this stage is focused more on sharing oneself with other people, which requires

having an identity. If an individual has not found their identity first then it will be difficult to find him or herself in someone else. Intimacy is defined by Erikson (1968) as a "fusing of identities" (p. 135) and is "the capacity to commit [oneself] to concrete affiliations and partnerships and to develop the ethical strength and abide by such commitments even though they may call for significant sacrifices and compromises" (p. 118). The "fusing of identities" would be more difficult if one of the individuals has not found their identity yet.

The sixth stage of Erikson's theory is the Intimacy vs. Isolation stage, taking place during young adulthood between the ages of 18 and 40 years. McLeod (2018) said, "During this period, the major conflict centers on forming intimate, loving relationships with other people. Successful completion of this stage can result in happy relationships and a sense of commitment, safety, and care within a relationship" (para. 46-48). This stage is not only focused on romantic relationships but also close relationships with friends and family. McLeod also adds that, "avoiding intimacy, fearing commitment and relationships can lead to isolation, loneliness, and sometimes depression" (para. 49). Sharing oneself with others while maintaining a strong sense of self-identity will play a big role in the success of this stage. Losing self identity will weaken the chance to keep relationships as strong as they would be if the self identity was strong. Erikson makes it clear that individuals who are successful in this stage will make long lasting and deep relationships with other people. Part of this involves being committed to each other. Without commitment, there is no real bond. It might feel fun in the beginning but when something compromises or tests the relationship and there is no real bond, then the relationship can fall apart. Reciprocating the love and connection is just as important. Giving and receiving love at this stage will prove how deep the relationship can be. Consideration of Diversity

Consideration of Diversity

My project will be conducted with students at Cal State University, Monterey Bay. Because I

will be conducting my presentation and my post survey in English, the participants will have to

be English proficient enough to be able to understand the content and complete the survey. My

project is also geared towards college students so individuals younger than college age will not

be able to go over the presentation or take the survey. Because the sample will be drawn the LS

and HDFS majors, there will be a disproportionate number of women in comparison to at

CSUMB as a whole. Of the 34 people in the study, 88% of them were women and and 9% were

men. The ethnicity of the individuals was mostly Hispanic/Latino with them being about 58%

and then whites being 30%. The rest were African American or other. The sexual orientation of

the individuals was mostly heterosexual with them being about 85%.

Learning Outcomes

I intend to provide a voice over Powerpoint and a post survey to college students at CSUMB.

By the end of my project, participants will:

1. Identify what emotional or developmental behavior is important to complete in both

    stages of development

2. Identify two healthy and two unhealthy relationship behaviors.

3. Describe two techniques for conflict management in a relationship.

Method

I created a Powerpoint presentation and turned it into a narrated Youtube video as my

project. See Appendix A. I also created a survey for my participants to take once they viewed

the presentation. See Appendix B. The video was about eight minutes long, and it had my

recorded voice narrating the presentation content so that my participants could listen to me speaking while the content of the presentation played. A link to the video and survey was disseminated through my professor to other instructors in the Liberal Studies Department. Those instructors disseminated the link to the students in their classes. The presentation link was first disseminated on Thursday, April 11 and remained open until Wednesday, April 24. During that time, there were 75 views of the presentation, and ultimately, 34 participants in the post-survey

Results

Learning Outcome 1 was the participants would identify what emotional or developmental behavior is important to complete in both stages of development from Erik Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development. There are eight stages in total but I talked about the two that were the most relevant for my project. I believe this learning outcome was partially met. The reason why it was partially met was because some of the participants put down answers that were not entirely what I was looking for. I wanted to know if they could identify the developmental behavior that is important to complete in the stages I talked about, but some people just put down the name of the stage like Intimacy vs Isolation or Identity vs Role Confusion. Other people put down "communication" as an answer. I didn't talk about communication in that part of the presentation. A couple people put down great answers including "sense of identity, role confusion, love relationships," "find your own identity," and "knowing and understanding your own personal identity so you can better form a relationship that is compatible and healthy with someone else personality." See Table 1 for what they said.

Learning Outcome 2 was the participants would identify two healthy and two unhealthy relationship behaviors. I believe this learning outcome was fully met. I feel like all the

participants were able to understand the content of the presentation and understand what was being asked. They all had really great answers that were a reflection of what I talked about. Almost all of the participants gave two examples for healthy and two examples for unhealthy relationships behaviors whereas a couple participants only gave an example for one of them. There were a couple people who gave examples that I had not talked about which was also good because they were thinking of more behaviors that could be healthy or unhealthy. Some responses that participants gave for healthy behaviors included talk in "I" statements, practice active listening, take responsibility for your actions, and build a culture of appreciation. The responses that were given for unhealthy behaviors included stonewalling, criticism, disrespect, and calling your partner names and verbally attacking them. See Table 2 for what they said.

Learning Outcome 3 was the participants would describe two techniques for conflict management in a relationship. I believe this learning outcome was fully met as well. The participants again were able to understand the content of the presentation as well as what was being asked. Each participant was able to give me a great answer. See Table 3 for what they said.

<div align="center">Discussion</div>

I believe this project was successful. From what I evaluated, the participants paid attention to the presentation video because they gave many answers on the survey that reflected the content. I could tell as well that they learned a lot and they were able to take some good points from the video. Since the goal of my presentation was to give people insight on how to maintain a healthy relationship, most of the participants said that they would use the techniques I talked about in their relationships. It also reminded a couple people of past relationships that

could have had better conflict management. I asked the participants if the content in the

presentation helped them think about the conflicts they have in their current relationship. Most

of them said in the survey that they had reflected back on their relationships during the video and

they said that the presentation gave them a refresher of different techniques they should use in

conflicts; it gave them better insight on other ways to communicate. It helped a lot of people by

making them aware of how they dealt with conflict in their current relationship and the role they

play. I am glad that my presentation really stood out for people. Another question I had for my

participants in the survey was if they would have any changes in dealing with conflicts in their

current relationships. A lot of people said they would change some ways they dealt with conflict

and they gave me a lot of different answers. In terms of diversity, my project only included LS

and HDFS majors. Since the presentation was sent out to only these two majors there were

mostly women in the study as they are more women in the majors than men. I was at first only

going to have just heterosexual people in the study but I thought it would be a good idea to

include everyone.

        If I had to do this over again, I would have done the whole thing in person instead of

sending out the presentation and survey in an email. I would also include a survey in the

beginning of the presentation to see how much participants knew about conflict management and

communication in relationships. Nonetheless, I feel like the participants were able to understand

a lot from the video and were able to take some important elements from it.

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Table 1

Participants' responses to emotional or developmental behavior important in both stages of

Erikson's theory:

Communication	sense of identity, role confusion, love relationships	find your own identity and intimacy	Identity vs. identity confusion and intimacy vs. isolation
Intimacy and isolation	Identity vs role confusion and intimacy vs isolation	Knowing and understanding your own personal identity so you can better form a relationship that is compatible and healthy with someone else personality	COMMUNICATION
To be able to communicate with each other and working towards having a healthy relationship.	respect for one another	Trust	self love
Identity and Intimacy	Being open to listen to others perspectives	Communication	Individuals must be able to find their own identity, and forming intimate, loving relationships.

Finding a secure sense of self	Interest to want to figure things out, and making it a routine to have constant communication are both important to successfully succeed in difficult times.	search for self identity	You must find your own sense of self identity.
Finding your own identity.	Fifth Stage: Identity vs Role Confusion and Sixth Stage: Intimacy vs Isolation	Intimacy & Isolation	finding your own identity
Identity vs. role confusion and Intimacy vs isolation	Fifth and Sixth Stages of development	communication	

Table 2

Participant's responses to two healthy and two unhealthy relationship behaviors:

stonewalling, criticism, talk in I statements,	healthy -listening and saying positive things unhealthy- criticism and contempt	healthy = remember you are a team and practice active listening. Unhealthy = criticism & defensiveness	Verbal takes to partner and gentle start up

Unhealthy: criticism and stonewalling Healthy: noticing body language and communicate with love instead of with anger and resentment	healthy: active listening and taking responsibility unhealthy: stonewalling and criticizing	healthy; trusting & considerate unhealthy; paranoia/untrusting & accusations	Affection and care about each other. Violence and disrespectful.
respecting and caring towards one another, not paying attention and refusing to listen to what the other person has to say.	Having communication with each other and being more positive. An unhealthy relationship would be to criticize the other when in an argument and treating them with disrespect.	Healthy- Voicing opinion, taking responsibility. Unhealthy -criticism, stonewalling	Healthy behaviors: Feeling safe around significant other & being able to communicate openly. Unhealthy behaviors: Possessiveness, Manipulative
Support and empathy Judgement and selfishness	Healthy= communication and selflessness Unhealthy= one sidedness and competing	healthy gentle start, use "I". unhealthy do not attack sense of self, verbal attack	communication and listening. criticism and not using I statements during an argument
Healthy: communication and trust. Unhealthy: criticism and contempt	Healthy: Patience and Affection Unhealthy: Impatience and criticism	Healthy: active listening, empathizing unhealthy: defensiveness and criticism	One healthy relationship behavior is to use I statements. Another healthy relationship behavior is to to look at your

			partners positive qualities. One unhealthy relationship behavior is to verbally attack your partner. Another one is to treating your partner with disrespect by calling them names.
Healthy: taking responsibility, appreciating your partner(s) Unhealthy: isolation, criticism	two healthy: find own identity and be able to commit two unhealthy: criticism and contempt	Criticism, and Stonewalling are unhealthy relationship behaviors. Healthy behaviors to put in practice in a relationship would be to actively listen, and talking about one's feelings without putting blame on someone else.	treat your partner with disrespect and build culture of appreciation
Two unhealthy relationship behaviors are stonewalling and criticism. Two healthy behaviors would be using "I"	Healthy: using "I" statements to express your feelings, take responsibility for your actions Unhealthy: being overly criticizing to your partner,	Unhealthy Relationship: Verbally Attack your partner, Treating your partner with disrespect, name calling, and mocking. Healthy Relationship:	successful completion of each stage results in a healthy personality

statements when you are upset to express positive need, as well taking a break to calm down if you are upset with your partner. Do something soothing and then come back and talk about it.	victimizing yourself and being defensive	Talking about your feelings by using "I" and building culture of appreciation etc.	
Unhealthy: verbally attacking your partner & treating your partner with disrespect. Healthy: reminding yourself of your partner's positive qualities & taking responsibility for your actions.	Unhealthy: Verbally attacking your partner and victimizing yourself Healthy: Using "I" statements and build a culture of appreciation	Talk about your feelings and talk with love. Verbally attacking partner and call bad names.	healthy: using "I" statements to express how I feel and assuming a position of superiority over my partner unhealthy: verbally attacking my partner and building a culture of appreciation

Table 3

Participant's responses for two techniques for conflict management:

active listening , are you going to die?	communicate and active listening	speak the truth and take note of body language	Talk in person and body language

Knowing my partner can't read my mind. And keeping up communication Talk it out in person. Don't have big or important conversations over the phone or text.	Talk through the issue and listen say "I feel this way" instead of blaming the other person	talk it out take time to cool down before it blows up	Talk and express what each other feel or think.
1. Take some time to cool off 2. Then begin to talk with respect and using "I" statements.	Talk it out in person and active listening.	avoid negative body language, take a 20 minute break away from each other	Walk away from a toxic relationship. Talk differences through, and/or give space during escalating events
Listening and taking a break from conflict to return later.	Understanding and positive	listen to what is being said that includes body language, and when feeling overwhelmed to take some time to cool off and think things through	Know that your partner cannot read your mind. Notice body language
Having communication and compromising	communicating with love Speaking your truth	When talking to partner, communicate with love and show your partner you care and you want to fix the issue. Do not communicate with	Active listening, communicate with love

		resement. In addition, talk to you partner in person and listen to their point of view.	
speak in person and communicate with love	Talking it out in person is a technique for conflict management so that no one is lost and both partners are on the same page, Noticing body language is also a technique considering one may come off as ignorant.	talk it out in person and notice body language	Remember that in an argument, you may think you have clearly stated how you feel or what you think, but your partner cannot read your mind so it is important to express yourself to them very clearly. Another technique is to use active listening, engaging in what they have to say earnestly without being on your phone or thinking about something else.
Actively listening to your partner. Communicating with your partner so that you are on the same page together and don't leave any room	Speak the truth, Active Listening, and Notice Body Language	take responsibility, remind yourself of your partner's positive qualities	1. Talk about issues or fights you have with your partner in person, texting can lead to miscommunication. 2. Be an active

for misunderstanding.			listener. Make sure to give your full attention.
talk it out in person and active listening	talk the problem out in person and remember that two makes a team.	Active Listening and understanding that my partner cannot read my mind as well as that we are a team and we work together to solve issues as a team	

Appendix A

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2W52OOy8Ww&feature=youtu.be

Introduction:

- Communication is an important aspect of any relationship

- Most people can learn how to communicate more effectively

- Better to act early if you are having difficulties

Developmental Stages:

- Successful completion of each stage results in a healthy personality

- Unsuccessful can be unhealthy

- Fifth Stage: Identity vs. Role Confusion

- Sixth Stage: Intimacy vs. Isolation

https://www.simplypsychology.org/Erik-Erikson.html

Fifth Stage: Identity vs. Role Confusion

- Wanting to belong somewhere and fit in

- Search for a sense of self and personal identity

- Failure to find sense of self can lead to role confusion

Sixth Stage: Intimacy vs. Isolation

- Intimacy is defined by fusing of identities by Erikson (1968)

- Major conflict centers on forming intimate, loving relationships

- Successful completion can result in happy relationships

- Avoiding intimacy can lead to isolation

Four Detrimental Communication Styles

● Criticism

● Contempt

● Defensiveness

Stonewalling

Criticism:

DO NOT:

● Different than offering a critique or voicing a complaint

● Verbally attack your partner

● Make the partner feel assaulted, rejected, and hurt

DO:

● Gentle start up

● Talk about your feelings using "I" statements and express a positive need

Contempt:

DO NOT:

- Attack sense of self with an intent to insult or abuse

- Assume a position of moral superiority over the partner

- Treat your partner with disrespect, mocking them, ridicule, call them names, or mimic

DO:

- Build culture of appreciation

- Remind yourself of your partner's positive qualities

- Positivity = less contempt

Defensiveness:

DO NOT:

- Victimize yourself to ward off a perceived attack and reverse the blame

DO:

- Take responsibility

- Accept your partner's perspective and offer an apology for any wrongdoing

Stonewalling:

DO NOT:

- Withdraw from the interaction to avoid conflict and convey disapproval, distance and separation

- Tune out and be unresponsive

DO:

- Physiological self-soothing

- Take a break and spend that time doing something soothing

Conflict Management Techniques:

1. Knowing your partner can't read your mind
2. Talk it out in person
3. Speak your truth
4. Active listening
5. Notice body language
6. Communicate with love
7. Are you going to die?
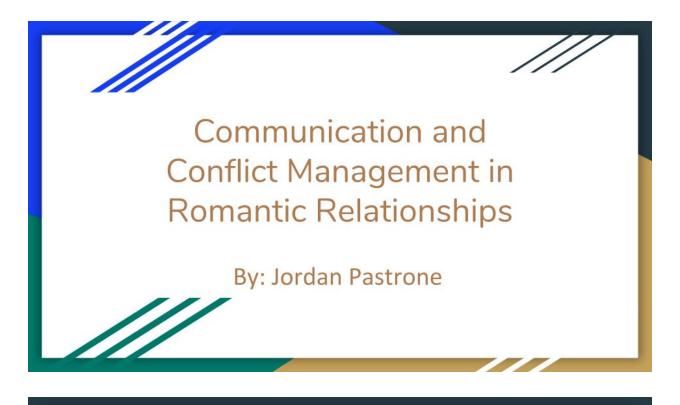8. Remember that you are a team

Conclusion:

- Every relationship will have their ups and downs

- Make an effort to manage your relationship

- Communicate well with your partner

- Team work makes the dream work

Thank You!

Appendix B

1. What emotional or developmental behavior is important to complete in both stages of development?

2. Identify two healthy and two unhealthy relationship behaviors:

3. Describe two techniques for conflict management in a relationship:

4. Gender

5. Age

6. Race/Ethnicity

7. Sexual Orientation

8. How long have you and your partner been together?

9. You believe that conflict in a relationship is:

10. Have you experienced conflict in your relationship that you could classify as positive and productive?

11. What made the experience positive and productive?

12. Have you experienced conflict in your relationship that you could classify as damaging or destructive?

13. What made the experience damaging or destructive?

14. How often do these conflicts arise?

15. How satisfied are you with your ability as a couple to resolve the conflict effectively?

16. Did the content in this presentation help you think about the conflicts you have in your current relationship? Please explain your answer.

17. What changes, if any, will you have in the way that you deal with conflict in your current

relationship?

Communication and Conflict Management in Romantic Relationships

By: Jordan Pastrone

Need Statement

- One of the top reasons for why relationships fail (Ni, 2015)
- Reasons for lack of communication are fear of rejection and concern they will do or say something to upset their partner
- Not telling your partner what you need keeps the relationship from changing and growing
- No communication can lead to misunderstanding

Capstone Project

- Conducted a presentation with audio and converted it into an 8 minute video
- Post survey of 17 questions
- Emailed both to CSUMB students
- Participants: 33 students (ages 19-49; avg. early 20s)

88% women

9% men

Erik Erikson's 5th Stage: Identity vs. Role Confusion

Identity:	Role Confusion:
• More independent • Looking to the future • Forming identity	• Not sure of themselves • Pressure can result in a negative identity

Erik Erikson's 6th Stage: Intimacy vs. Isolation

Intimacy:	Isolation:
• "Fusing of identities" (Erikson, 1968) • Developing and maintaining successful relationships	• Loneliness • Depression

Learning Outcomes

By the end of my project, participants will be able to...

1. Identify what emotional or developmental behavior is important to complete in both stages of development
2. Identify two healthy and two unhealthy relationship behaviors
3. Describe two techniques for conflict management in a relationship

Content in the Presentation:

- Introduced communication as a central part of a relationship
- Talked about the 5th and 6th stages of Erikson's developmental stages (L.O. 1)
- Healthy and unhealthy ways of four detrimental communication styles (L.O. 2)
- 8 conflict management techniques (L.O. 3)

Results

Results:

- L.O. 1: Identify what emotional or developmental behavior is important to complete in both stages of development
- Partially met

- communication
- sense of identity, role confusion, love relationships
- find your own identity and intimacy
- Identity vs. identity confusion and intimacy vs. isolation
- Intimacy and isolation
- Identity vs role confusion and intimacy vs isolation
- Knowing and understanding your own personal identity so you can better form a relationship that is compatible and healthy with someone else personality
- COMMUNICATION
- To be able to communicate with each other and working towards having a healthy relationship.
- Finding a secure sense of self
- Interest to want to figure things out, and making it a routine to have constant communication are both important to successfully succeed in difficult times.
- search for self identity
- You must find your own sense of self identity.
- Finding your own identity.

Results:

- L.O. 2: Identify two healthy and two unhealthy relationship behaviors.
- Met

Healthy	Unhealthy
Talk in "I" statements x10	Criticism x 23
Saying positive things x9	Contempt x11
A culture of appreciation x5	Stonewalling x7
Taking responsibility x5	Defensiveness x5

Results:

- L.O. 3: Describe two techniques for conflict management in a relationship.
- Fully met

- Know that your partner cannot read your mind. Notice body language
- speak the truth and take note of body language
- Talk in person and body language
- Knowing my partner can't read my mind. And keeping up communication Talk it out in person.
- Talk through the issue and listen say "I feel this way" instead of blaming the other person
- talk it out take time to cool down before it blows up
- Talk and express what each other feel or think.
- Talk it out in person and active listening.
- avoid negative body language, take a 20 minute break away from each other
- Talking it out in person is a technique for conflict management so that no one is lost and both partners are on the same page, Noticing body language is also a technique considering one may come off as ignorant.
- Listening and taking a break from conflict to return later.
- Speak the truth, Active Listening, and Notice Body Language
- talk it out in person and active listening
- talk the problem out in person and remember that two makes a team.
- talk it out in person and notice body language

Did the content in this presentation help you think about the conflicts you have in your current relationship? Please explain your answer.

- It reminded me of things (techniques) that I have not tried to try and resolve conflics with my current partner
- My partner and me like to use healthy conflict management techniques, your presentation reminded me of those techniques and their importance.
- It didn't not, but it's made me think of other unhealthy relationships that I know and would like for them to get help.
- Yes. It gave me a refresher on techniques and what's a good and bad way to handle conflicts. It also reminded me how important open communication is.
- Yes it gave me more insight on other ways to communicate.
- Yes, it was actually very relevant to what I am going through now. I was aware about some conflict management techniques already, but others were new to me. It was useful to learn some of the terms used as well.
- It has made me more aware of my role and their roll in the relationship and how we both need to work together to make sure this ship keeps sailing.

Discussion:

What Worked:	What I Would Change:
• Participants were able to reflect on their current relationships • ⅔ L.O.s were met • Positive feedback	• Create a pre survey to check growth • In person for different results and discussion

Thank You! Any Questions?

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