Communication and Conflict Resolution
Gender Differences in Communication

- **Women** –
  - send clearer messages.
  - give more positive or negative messages
  - set the emotional tone and escalate arguments
  - Rapport Talk (feelings, empathy)

- **Men** –
  - Give neutral messages
  - Withdraw
  - Report talk (factual accounting)
Happily Married Couples

- Willing to engage in conflict in nondestructive ways.
- Have less frequent conflict, spend less time in conflict.
- Disclose private feelings
- Express equal levels of affection.
- Spend more time together.
- Accurately encode and decode messages.
Barriers to Communication

- Traditional male gender role
  - discourages expression of emotion.
- Personal reasons
  - feelings of inadequacy
- Fear of conflict.
Power

- The ability to influence another person or group.

- Traditionally, legal as well as de facto power rested in the hands of the husband.
  - “Final say” decision-making

- Wives have been gaining more actual power in relationships,
  - power distribution still remains unequal.
Six Bases of Marital Power

- Coercive - fear of punishment
- Reward - get positive reinforcement
- Expert - specialized knowledge
- Legitimate - based on rights and duty
- Referent - admiration
- Informational - persuasive, in my best interests
Types of Conflict

- **Basic conflicts**
  - challenge fundamental rules
  - potential “deal-breakers”
  - *Personality* conflicts
    - based on the need to release pent-up feelings or
      - fundamental personality differences.

- **Nonbasic** conflicts
  - do not threaten basic assumptions
  - may be negotiable.
  - *Situational* conflicts
    - based on specific issues.
Major Sources of Marital Conflict

- Sex
- Money
- Housework
- Discipline of Children
Problem-Solving Styles

- **Validating**
  - Compromise
  - Calm
  - Mutual satisfaction

- **Volatile**
  - Passionate disputes

- **Conflict-Avoiding**
  - Agree to disagree
  - Rarely confront
Two Types of Communication

- **Verbal** - content

- **Non-Verbal** – everything else
  - Indicates how words are to be interpreted
  - Proximity, eye contact, and touch are important forms of nonverbal communication.

- **Congruence**
  - Agreement between verbal and non-verbal
Functions of Nonverbal communication

1. Convey interpersonal attitudes
2. Express emotions
3. Handle the ongoing interaction.
4. For communication to be clear, verbal and nonverbal messages must agree.
Communication Loop
Four Styles of Miscommunication

- **Placaters** - passive, helpless, always agreeable.
- **Blamers** - act superior, often angry, do not listen, try to escape responsibility.
- **Computers** - correct, reasonable, expressionless.
- **Distractors** - frenetic, tend to change subject.
The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

- **Contempt** –
  - Feeling one’s spouse is inferior or undesirable
  - Intention to insult
    - Name-calling
    - Hostile humor
    - Mockery
    - Body language-sneering, rolling eyes

- **Criticism**
  - Making disapproving judgments or evaluations
  - Attacking personality not behavior
The Four Horseman cont’d

- **Defensiveness**
  - Preparing to defend oneself against what one presumes is an upcoming attack
  - Denying responsibility
  - Making excuses
  - Disagreeing with negative mind-reading
  - Cross-complaining
  - Repeating yourself

- **Stonewalling**
  - Resistance, refusing to listen
  - Shutting down
Conflict Resolution

May be achieved through negotiation by:

- Agreement as a freely given gift
- Bargaining
- Coexistence
Trust

- **Belief in integrity of person.**

- **In order to develop:**
  - relationship has to have likelihood of continuing.
  - must be able to predict how partner will behave.
  - partner must have other acceptable options available to him or her.
Mutual Affirmation

The basis of good communication in a relationship.

Includes:

- mutual acceptance
- mutual liking
- expressing liking in words and actions
Resolving Conflict

- Happily married couples resolve conflict through paraphrasing, validation, and clarification.

- Unhappy couples use confrontation, defensiveness, and complaining.