

A Thematic Analysis of Intergroup Communication Over Time*

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to isolate the themes in participants' descriptions of their communication with members of different ethnic groups or cultures over four interaction periods. Six themes were identified in the study: uncertainty, comfort, intimacy of communication, stereotypes, similarities, and quality of communication. Descriptions of uncertainty, (an inability to predict others' feelings, thoughts, and behavior), and reliance on stereotypes (the use of categorical labels to which expectations were attached) indicate that they consistently decreased over time. Descriptions of intimacy of communication (providing personal information to partners), comfort (the respondents' feelings about interacting with strangers), and quality of communication (respondents' descriptions of whether or not communication had been effective) suggest that they increased over time. The types of similarities (the identification of aspects the respondents had in common) identified changed over time. Specific patterns that emerged from respondents' descriptions of their intergroup communication over time were isolated. Interrelationships among the themes revealed that respondents began interacting by using their social identities, identified similarities, and moved to using their personal identities.

Gudykunst (1995) argues that one way of differentiating whether relationships are primarily interpersonal or intergroup is by examining the identities used to guide individuals' behavior. If the behavior is governed by individuals' personal identities (e.g., identities based on individuals seeing themselves as being unique from others), the relationship is considered interpersonal. If the behavior is governed by individuals' social identities (e.g., identities based on group memberships), the relationship is considered intergroup (Turner, 1987). Since social identities can be based on membership in cultures or ethnic groups, intercultural and interethnic relationships fall under the broader category of intergroup relationships.

When individuals initially interact with members of other groups, their communication tends to be based on their social identities (Gudykunst, 1995). Gudykunst (1995) explains that when individuals meet members of other groups, their levels of uncertainty and anxiety are high. As they get to know strangers and begin to base their communication on their personal identities, individuals' uncertainty and anxiety levels decrease (Hubbert, Gudykunst, & Guerrero, in press). Anxiety/uncertainty management (AUM; Gudykunst, 1993, 1995) theory links the management of anxiety and uncertainty to effective communication in interpersonal and intergroup encounters. It provides a theoretical framework for understanding intergroup communication over time. AUM theory, however, is not a theory of relationship development. In order to explain the development of intergroup relationships over time, a theory of relationship development that is applicable to

intergroup relationships also is needed. Altman and Taylor's (1973) social penetration theory has been extended to explain intergroup relationship development (e.g., Gudykunst & Kim, 1992).

Social penetration theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973) describes the development of interpersonal relationships. The theory posits that as individuals continue to interact, they reveal more information about themselves in general and they also reveal more intimate aspects of themselves. If participants perceive that the rewards of the potential relationship are worth the effort, the relationship progresses as described. If, however, the participants perceive that the costs of the potential relationship outweigh the rewards, the relationship does not develop any further. In this case, the topics of disclosure will remain superficial and will not become more intimate.

While AUM and social penetration theories provide general explanations of communication and relationship development in intergroup relationships, they do not provide descriptions of the specific processes occurring in intergroup interactions over time. In order to describe the communication that occurs during intergroup relationship development, the everyday processes of a relationship must be isolated and attempts must be made to obtain data which are collected as closely as possible to the time of interaction (Duck, 1991). In addition, efforts should be made to glean information from multiple interaction points--not only initial encounters. Diaries have been successfully used to obtain data from several single interaction studies (Duck, 1991; Duck, Rutt, Hurst, & Strejc, 1991) and one multiple interaction study (Hubbert *et al.*, in press).

Depending upon their construction, diaries may yield quantitative or qualitative data. Thematic analysis has been used to study qualitative data on intergroup relationship development between North American and Japanese respondents (Gudykunst, Gao, Sudweeks, Ting-Toomey, & Nishida 1991; Kertamus, Gudykunst, & Nishida 1991; Sudweeks, Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, & Nishida 1990). Thematic analysis also has been used to examine respondents' brief descriptions of their communication in one study of intergroup relationship development over time (Hubbert *et al.*, in press). The qualitative descriptions of communication in Hubbert *et al.*'s (in press) study provided limited data because the respondents had completed extensive quantitative diaries prior to completing the qualitative diaries. In addition, no theoretical framework was used to guide the construction of the questions contained in the diary.

More research is needed to extend the thematic findings of Hubbert *et al.* (in press). By using a theoretical framework in the development of diary questions, researchers can guide respondents to focus their thinking on their communication behavior and provide insight into the intergroup relationship development process over time. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to extend Hubbert *et al.*'s (in press) thematic findings by examining the themes which emerge in respondents' descriptions of their communication behavior in intergroup relationships over time.

Intergroup Relationship Development

AUM (Gudykunst, 1995) and social penetration (Altman & Taylor, 1973) theories were used to guide the collection and interpretation of descriptions of communication behavior over time. The descriptions were analyzed using thematic analysis (Owen, 1984). We begin by overviewing the theoretical perspectives.

Theoretical Perspectives

AUM theory (Gudykunst, 1995) is based on the management of anxiety and uncertainty in order to create effective communication. Berger and Calabrese (1975) explain that uncertainty is a cognitive phenomenon we experience when we are unable to predict others' attitudes, feelings, or

behavior. Anxiety, on the other hand, is the emotional counterpart of uncertainty and includes affective reactions such as stress and nervousness (Gudykunst, 1995). In order to be able to communicate effectively, individuals must successfully manage their anxiety and uncertainty. Gudykunst (1995) argues that as individuals interact with strangers or members of other groups over time, their levels of uncertainty and anxiety decrease, and Hubbert *et al.*'s (in press) data support this position.

One of the major factors influencing uncertainty and anxiety is individuals' expectations. Expectations involve the anticipation of something positive or negative in the future, and are based on individuals' knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, stereotypes, roles, and prior interaction (Gudykunst, 1993, 1995). The expectations individuals have for strangers' behavior tend to be negative (Hoyle, Pinkley, & Insko, 1989). As relationships progress, however, the negative expectations decrease and often are replaced with more positive expectations (Hubbert *et al.*, in press).

Gudykunst (1995) also argues that the identification of similarities is a critical element in the development of intergroup relationships. In order for effective communication to occur, individuals must be aware of the differences and similarities they have with strangers. When individuals identify similarities with strangers, the strangers become less threatening. Perceived similarities reduce anxiety and uncertainty (Gudykunst, Chua, & Gray, 1987; Stephan & Stephan, 1985).

When initially interacting with strangers, individuals use information about strangers' group memberships to make predictions. As the relationships become more intimate, individuals reveal more personal information about themselves and describe their uniqueness. Similarly, they begin to view strangers as individuals and use the strangers' personal information (e.g., uniqueness) to make predictions. In order for relationships to progress and effective communication to occur, individuals must move from basing their communication on their social identities and begin to base their communication on their personal identities. In addition, effective communication requires that misunderstandings be minimized. When individuals interact with strangers, they use their own frames of reference to interpret the strangers' communication, often misinterpreting the messages. Consequently, communication with strangers tends to be less effective than communication between friends (Gudykunst, 1995, Gudykunst & Shapiro, 1996).

Social penetration theory describes how individuals move from strangers to friends. Altman and Taylor (1973) explain that "people are generally believed to let others know them gradually, first revealing less intimate information and only later making more personal aspects of their lives accessible" (p. 6). Essentially, the theory posits that as dyadic partners interact over time, they disclose more information about different topics (breadth) and disclose more intimate information (depth). If the interactants predict that the rewards are sufficient to continue the relationship, they will increase both the breadth and depth of their self-disclosure and the relationship will progress to a deeper level.

Altman and Taylor (1973) proffer four stages of relationship development: orientation, exploratory affective exchange, affective exchange, and stable exchange. Stage one, orientation, occurs when strangers or distant acquaintances meet. Because interactants at this stage do not reveal much information about themselves, their interactions are characterized by stereotyped responses and limited verbal interaction. The second stage, exploratory affective exchange, is

described by Altman and Taylor (1973) as involving friendly, relaxed, and casual interactions. They add that the flow of interaction is smoother and communication becomes more synchronized than in the first stage. They note, too, that most relationships remain at this stage. The third stage, affective exchange, involves relationships with an "extensive history of association" (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 139). Relationships in the third stage are characterized by synchrony of communication, displays of intimate affection, the breaking down of barriers, and free exchange between partners. The final stage of relationship development is stable exchange. They explain that only a few friendships and romantic relationships progress to this level. At this stage, relationship partners know each other well and can accurately predict the other's feelings and behaviors. These relationships are also characterized by efficient, synchronized communication. Although Altman and Taylor's (1973) work was generated from the study of interpersonal relationships, it also applies to intergroup relationship development. Gudykunst and Kim (1992) used social penetration theory to describe and provide a foundation for understanding intergroup relationships. In addition, they applied the stages of social penetration theory to intergroup relationship development and pointed out that there are similarities in the process of social penetration across cultures.

Thematic Analysis of Intergroup Relationship Development

Examining intergroup relationship development requires that researchers be able to identify the processes which occur within relationships across time. Researchers need data which were not only obtained close to the actual interaction, but were also collected from different points in time. One way of isolating these processes is through the use of diaries. Duck (1991) argues that diaries allow individuals to record their perceptions from the standpoint of being within a relationship. Both the perception and the relationship itself are subjective in nature. Hence, both partners in a relationship may have vastly different perceptions or subjective experiences which can be captured through the use of a diary method. Duck (1991) believes that participants are able to record information while it is still fresh, free from the interference of the researcher, and without interruption of the interaction by external parties. Diaries are valuable for examining what occurs in relationships over time.

Diaries can be quantitative or qualitative in nature. Only qualitative diaries, however, focus on respondents' subjective perceptions of their communication. One way to examine diaries from a qualitative standpoint is by conducting a thematic analysis of the subjective diary entries. Owen (1984) suggests the use of thematic analysis as one way to see how partners perceive and describe their relationships. Likewise, Bochner (1978) describes the value of studying themes in relationship development when he notes that "we need to look carefully at the content of interactional data if we are to uncover the themes of . . . relationships around which interaction revolves" (p. 183). Themes describe recurring ideas that take place when individuals communicate. Owen (1984) defines a theme as the "patterned semantic issue or locus of concern around which a couple's interaction centers" (p. 274). Thus, themes describe the recurring, unifying ideas interactants may have.

Several thematic studies have been conducted which explore intercultural relationship development between Japanese and North American respondents using a social penetration framework. In the first of these studies, Sudweeks *et al.* (1990) sought to identify respondents' interpretations of past intercultural interactions. The sample included female-female

Japanese/North American relationships. Four main themes were identified which described respondents' perceptions: communication competence, similarity, involvement, and turning points. The second study of Japanese/North American respondents conducted by Gudykunst *et al.* (1991) focused on female-male Japanese/North American relationships. As in the previous study, four main themes emerged: typicality, communication competence, similarity, and involvement. Kertamus, Gudykunst, and Nishida (1991) studied male-male Japanese/North American relationships. Finally, Kertamus *et al.* (1991) also identified four emergent themes in these relationships: communication competence, similarity, involvement, and relational tests.

While the aforementioned studies are thematic analyses of intergroup relationship development, their data are limited for a number of reasons. First, the data used were collected from individuals' recall of past intergroup relationships and may include more memories than actual descriptions of behavior. Additionally, a significant amount of time may have elapsed between the time of the intergroup interaction and the recall of the data. Finally, the studies do not describe the processes occurring over time within the intergroup relationship. One study, however, has examined intergroup relationship development over time and is reviewed next.

Hubbert *et al.* (in press) examined the perceptions of European Americans and non-European Americans who met with a person from a different culture or ethnic group over four interactions. Respondents completed diary accounts after each interaction. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. The quantitative data revealed that for both European Americans and non-European Americans, uncertainty and anxiety were at their highest levels during the first interaction and decreased steadily, reaching their lowest levels on the fourth interaction. Not only did anxiety and uncertainty reduce significantly by the fourth interaction, but the data also revealed that a decrease in uncertainty was associated with a decrease in anxiety at each of the interaction points. In addition, the data revealed that quality of communication and satisfaction with communication increased over time. Interactions also became more positive over time for both European Americans and non-European Americans.

The qualitative data collected in Hubbert *et al.* (in press) resulted from respondents' brief descriptions of their communication on the diary forms and from papers they wrote for the course. A thematic analysis was conducted and three primary themes were identified: similarities, self-disclosure, and identity. The first theme Hubbert *et al.* (in press) identified was similarities. Respondents first used similarities as a means of gathering information about their partners in order to make predictions about their behavior and then used these similarities as a means of reducing uncertainty and anxiety. The second theme was self-disclosure. Respondents indicated that the passing of time had a positive effect on the relationships by increasing the quantity and intimacy of self-disclosure as the relationships progressed to the "friend" level. The final theme was identity. The subjects noted they moved from basing their communication on their social identities to basing their communication on their personal identities, thus enabling the respondents to re-evaluate stereotypical expectations they had when they first began interacting with their dyadic partners.

Purpose of the Present Study

The purpose of this study was to extend the qualitative aspects of Hubbert *et al.* (in press). No theoretical perspective was used to develop the questions in the qualitative portion of Hubbert

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et al.'s (in press) study, and the descriptions the respondents provided of their communication and the subsequent analysis of the qualitative data were limited. There is a need to ask more specific questions to guide respondents' thinking about their communication behavior. In constructing these questions, however, a theoretical perspective is required.

Some scholars argue that qualitative research is never completed without some guiding theoretical framework. Even when researchers believe they are free from theoretical grounding, a subjective theoretical perspective exists, nonetheless. Miles (1983) explains that

the need to develop grounded theory usually exists in tension with the need for clarity and focus; research projects that pretend to come to the study with no assumptions usually encounter difficulty . . . a rough working frame needs to be in place near the beginning of fieldwork. Of course it will change. The risk is *not* that of "imposing" a self-blinding framework, but that an incoherent, bulky, irrelevant, meaningless set of observations will be produced. (p. 119)

Without at least a thumb-nail sketch of a theoretical perspective, qualitative research efforts may lack focus or may fail to produce significant, viable results.

As indicated earlier, the theoretical perspectives adopted in this research were AUM (Gudykunst, 1993, 1995) and social penetration (Altman & Taylor, 1973) theories. Based on AUM and social penetration theories, one broad research question was posed for study: What themes describing anxiety and uncertainty management processes occur in intergroup relationship development over time?

Methods

Respondents

Students in a large section of a general education intercultural communication course at a moderate-sized, western university completed diary forms after each interaction as part of an assignment for the course. Each student selected a partner who was either of a different ethnicity or from a different culture with whom they interacted. Because there was an imbalance in the numbers of European Americans and non-European Americans, a few triads were formed.

Respondents were instructed to interact with their partners over four periods of time. The length of time for each interaction averaged approximately 30 minutes. The majority of the respondents met on campus but outside of the classroom. After each interaction, respondents completed a qualitative diary form (described below) developed for this study.

The sample included 104 respondents.¹ The respondents in the sample were 35 males and 69 females. Their ages ranged from 19 to 50 with an average age of 26.5. The ethnic breakdown included 58 European Americans, 25 Latin Americans or Latino/Latina Americans, two African Americans, and 19 Asians or Asian Americans. Thirty-six of the dyads were intercultural, and 16 were interethnic.

Diaries

Respondents completed one diary account after each interaction. Each diary record contained eleven questions aimed at recording respondents' subjective perceptions of their communication during the encounter. The questions were:

1. Describe what you discussed during your interaction.
2. What uncertainties did you have about the other person's attitudes, feelings, or behavior during the interaction?
3. What were your feelings during the interaction?
4. What information about yourself did you tell the other person?
5. What information did the other person ask you about yourself?
6. What similarities or dissimilarities did you notice between yourself and the other person?
7. How did you try to present yourself during the interaction? How did you communicate your cultural or ethnic identity to the other person?
8. How did the other person try to present him or herself during the interaction? How did the other person communicate her or his cultural or ethnic identity to you?
9. Which stereotypes you have of the other person's culture or ethnic group affected the interaction? How did the stereotypes affect the way you communicated with the other person?
10. Was your communication effective or ineffective? What cues did you use to determine whether your communication with the other person was effective or ineffective?
11. How was your communication in this interaction different from your communication in the previous interaction? Why do you think it was different? (Ignore this question for first interaction).

Plan for Data Analysis

The diary forms from each dyad were paired together. The responses were read on a dyad-by-dyad basis to get a sense of what was occurring in each dyad over time. For all interactions, the European American's comments in a dyad were read first, followed by a reading of the non-European American's comments.

When the same meaning was found in the comments of both the European Americans and non-European Americans for a particular dyad (thus meeting the recurrence criteria, Owen, 1984), those comments were considered evidence of a theme. In addition, key words or phrases were repeated throughout the respondents' comments. Because these repeated words and phrases met Owen's (1984) criteria for repetition, they were also isolated as thematic evidence. Finally, the comments of the dyadic partners were examined to determine whether they revealed the respondents' emotions (i.e., the forcefulness criteria, Owen, 1984). During the first thematic review of the data, the themes which had the most apparent evidence were uncertainty, comfort, and intimacy of communication. During a second thematic review, the themes of similarities, stereotypes, and quality of communication were isolated.

After the six themes were isolated, the groups of themes were then reviewed to determine whether they should be combined or if there were subthemes of the major themes. It is important to note that evidence for the themes appeared in places other than in the respondents' answers to the questions pertaining to the theme. For example, respondents commented on uncertainty under

question two and some of the respondents also discussed elements of uncertainty in question eleven.

After the data had been sorted according to themes, each theme was separated by interaction time. Each interaction point (e.g., interaction one) was examined in order to determine the dynamics which were occurring within the various dyads at that particular point in time. The next interaction point (e.g., interaction two) was examined in the same manner until all interaction points had been reviewed. Notes were taken to describe the change which was occurring in each interaction point and the change over time. In some cases, tallies were completed. For example, in the similarity theme, a tally was completed for the types of similarities identified at the different interaction points. This was done for each time so the change over time could be noted.

After the initial analysis, the data were once again examined for evidence of interrelationships among themes. Respondents' comments were selected as evidence of the interrelationships among the themes. For example, if respondents mentioned that their comfort level increased because they had identified similarities, this supported an interrelationship between the themes of similarity and comfort.

Reliability checks were conducted by two graduate students who were not affiliated with the study. Four quotations from each theme (e.g., 24 quotations, one from each interaction time) were selected randomly. The names of the themes and their definitions were given to the graduate students who were not familiar with the study. After they read the definitions, the graduate students were given the 24 randomly selected quotations. The graduate students were asked to read the quotations and place each quotation into the theme which they believed best matched the quotation. During the first reliability check, the graduate student was not told that she had been presented with four quotations from each theme. The graduate student matched 21 of the 24 quotations with the correct themes. Two of the three quotations which were matched incorrectly had elements of two related themes. The quotations were clarified to reflect only one theme per quotation. When examining the third incorrect match, it was determined that there was a minor flaw in the definition of the theme which was remedied before the next reliability check was conducted. During the second reliability check, the graduate student was told that he had been presented with four quotations from each theme. The graduate student correctly matched all of the quotations with the respective themes.

Results and Discussion

In the first section, the themes identified in the study are described and discussed. Sample respondent comments are also included to illustrate the change over time. Because themes, by their nature, are interrelated (Spradley, 1979), interrelationships among the identified themes also are presented.

Themes

Six themes were identified in this study: uncertainty, comfort, intimacy of communication, stereotypes, similarities, and quality of communication. Each theme is defined and described below. The results for each theme are discussed next. Representative comments are presented to illustrate the themes and demonstrate how they changed over time.

Uncertainty. The first theme, uncertainty, was defined as an inability to predict their own or others' thoughts or behaviors, or the inability to predict the state of the relationship between the participants. Respondents described a pattern which indicated that uncertainty decreased over time.

In most cases, however, this decrease was not described until the third interaction. During the first two interactions, the respondents described various types of uncertainty. Respondents experienced uncertainty regarding the relationship, topics of discussion, the smoothness of the interaction, and uncertainty in general.

In response to their first interaction, two European Americans (note: for comparison purposes, the group membership [EA=European American, NEA=non-European American] and dyad number are provided for each quotation) commented:

I was most uncertain about what I was expected to ask and about what would be asked of me. (EA, Dyad 6)

I found myself wondering what she might be thinking of me. . . . We just started asking questions. I mostly kept the conversation going. (EA, Dyad 21)

The non-European American partners noted:

I think I was uncertain [about] what would be expected of me. (NEA, Dyad 6)

[I] wasn't sure if the person was going to like me. [I] didn't know what to start talking about. [I] was unsure whether her ideals were going to agree with mine. (NEA, Dyad 21)

Other respondents wrote comments like, "I was a little uncertain on how to approach a conversation with him" (EA, Dyad 12); "I was uncertain if he would understand me completely because I talk so fast. [I was also] unsure of what to expect from a stranger" (EA, Dyad 27); and "I was uncertain in the beginning about if we would get along. I didn't know if she liked me" (EA, Dyad 3). The respondents' comments presented not only illustrate the existence of uncertainty, but they also allude to the different types of uncertainty the partners experienced (e.g., general, relational, self-disclosure).

During the second interaction, the partners in most of the dyads were still describing their uncertainties. Two European American partners explained:

I was uncertain about how to best explain my own ethnicity. (EA, Dyad 18)

I first had uncertainties about whether his English was going to be easy to understand. However, after our first and second interactions, my uncertainty of a language barrier soon disappeared. (EA, Dyad 12)

Two non-European Americans wrote:

I was not sure if I could openly request information about groups other than her own, particularly [Latinos]. (NEA, Dyad 18)

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I had many uncertainties during this meeting. We no longer had the introductory scripts to rely on for communication and conversation seemed kind of forced. (NEA, Dyad 36)

A few respondents began to report reduced uncertainty by the second interaction. Two respondents wrote, "A lot of uncertainties I had were beginning to ease" (EA, Dyad 26); and "[There were] fewer uncertainties about personal life" (NEA, Dyad 7). The majority of the respondents' comments, however, indicated that various types of uncertainty (e.g., general, relational, what to self-disclose) continued to be present. Other respondents explained, "[I was] still a little unsure about interacting with [a person] I do not know" (EA, Dyad 41); "[I was] uncertain about my partner's feelings regarding me and my opinions" (EA, Dyad 33); "I was a little uncertain on how to approach a conversation with him" (EA, Dyad 12); and "I was worried she might not contribute enough for the project" (EA, Dyad 32). These comments illustrate that the majority of the respondents were continuing to experience uncertainty during the second interaction.

During the third interaction, most of the comments seemed to indicate a reduction in uncertainty. Two European Americans noted:

I had one or two uncertainties. (EA, Dyad 16)

At this stage, our uncertainties decreased. We were very comfortable talking to each other about general subjects. During our conversation, the feelings and attitudes were comfortable. No negativity. (EA, Dyad 4)

Two non-European Americans echoed these comments:

I felt a lot less uncertainties and began feeling more comfortable in the [dyad]. I was very relieved it was easier to talk. (NEA, Dyad 36)

[I had] very low uncertainty [about my partner]. (NEA, Dyad 4)

When respondents described uncertainty at this interaction, it was uncertainty regarding what to self-disclose and uncertainty about the relationship. Other respondents explained, "While discussing cultural diversity, I was unsure of how I could say [things] without offending [my partner]" (EA, Dyad 33); "I was not sure of [my partner's] feelings [about] someone with [my] type of job" (NEA, Dyad 33); and "My only uncertainties were what reactions she would have to my feelings" (Dyad 38). As evidenced by the above comments, respondents began to describe a reduction in uncertainty levels, however, some uncertainty was still present.

During the final interaction, the respondents clearly indicated reduced uncertainty, however, some uncertainty remained. Some European Americans explained:

I wasn't sure if he would become offended by the questions I was asking. (EA, Dyad 13)

Two non-European Americans commented:

I had very little uncertainty [about] the other person. (NEA, Dyad 18)

My uncertainties were decreasing. (NEA, Dyad 30)

Other respondents wrote comments like, "The only uncertainty I had was exactly what we were to talk about" (NEA, Dyad 40); "I was uncertain about the different issues we were discussing and our feelings of difference for those issues" (NEA, Dyad 3); and "I was just a little uncertain that now that I was exposing more of my personal identity, that he would think I was weird or something" (NEA, Dyad 20). By the fourth interaction, the majority of the respondents described a reduction in uncertainty. Those respondents who described uncertainty continued to refer to uncertainty about the relationship and self-disclosure.

The majority of the respondents reported that they had "no" uncertainties by the fourth interaction. Based on the context of their comments, however, it is evident that the respondents did not mean they had complete confidence in their attributions about their partners' behavior. Rather, the comments seem to suggest that the uncertainties which were foremost in the thoughts of the respondents at a given interaction point were reduced sufficiently to enable them to feel confident in their predictions.

The results of this theme indicate a distinct reduction in uncertainty over time. In the majority of cases, uncertainty levels began to consistently drop by the third interaction. These findings are consistent with AUM theory (Gudykunst, 1995) which predicts that individuals' levels of uncertainty will decline over time. In addition, the results are compatible with Hubbert *et al.*'s (in press) study which revealed that respondents' uncertainty was at its highest level during the first interaction and at its lowest level during the fourth interaction.

Comfort. Nearly all of the respondents described the second theme, comfort, at one interaction point or another. This theme was identified as the respondents' feelings about interacting with strangers, or, in other words, their anxiety levels. When describing this theme, the respondents used words such as "anxiety," "uncomfortable," "nervous," and "uneasy" to describe their comfort levels.

In order to describe the change in comfort level over time, the comments from two dyads are reported here. The European American partners reported at interaction one:

I get nervous with new people and I tend to talk a lot, so I felt I did a lot of the talking and asking questions. (EA, Dyad 38)

A trifle nervous. (EA, Dyad 35)

The non-European American partners in these dyads explained:

Uncomfortable feelings at first. I wanted to show them my true personality which I believe I overemphasized. I tried to be too cool--I don't know why. (NEA, Dyad 35)

Other respondents explained, "We both seemed uneasy at first" (NEA, Dyad 1); "I was uncomfortable at having to sit and talk to [a] stranger" (EA, Dyad 33); "[I had a] feeling of awkwardness" (NEA, Dyad 33); "I felt a little nervous getting to know her" (EA, Dyad 39); and "[I was] nervous, anxious, unsure, [and] awkward" (NEA, Dyad 21). As these comments illustrate, respondents' levels of anxiety were elevated during the first interaction. In other words, the majority of the respondents were uncomfortable or nervous at this point.

During the second interaction, most of the respondents felt more comfortable than at time one. Two European Americans wrote:

[I am] getting more comfortable. We were able to discuss more personal opinions rather than giving bios on each other. (EA, Dyad 2)

I still feel anxiety about what I say. I felt a little more comfortable as we had some information from the first interaction to talk about. (EA, Dyad 27)

Two non-European Americans explained:

[Our interaction] was somewhat different [than the first interaction]. The reason for this is because I thought we were a little more comfortable with each other. (NEA, Dyad 31)

I felt much better. At the beginning, she was quiet; however, as our conversation progressed, we got more comfortable. At the beginning of the conversation, I didn't know what to say or what to ask. (NEA, Dyad 27)

Other respondents' comments included, "[I was] not so uncomfortable anymore" (EA, Dyad 41); "[I am] getting more comfortable" (EA, Dyad 2); and "I thought we were a little more comfortable with each other" (NEA, Dyad 31). Many respondents began to describe a reduction in anxiety by the second interaction. However, it was clear that some degree of anxiety was still present.

By the third interaction, the vast majority of the respondents wrote that they were comfortable with their partners. Two European Americans explained:

[We were] more relaxed [and] didn't have to be concerned about what topics to talk about. (EA, Dyad 7)

This interaction was better than number two because . . . as we got to know each other, we became more comfortable. (EA, Dyad 5)

The non-European American partners in these dyads commented:

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We were more relaxed [than in the previous interactions], and our communication seemed less stressful. (NEA, Dyad 7)

We continued to be more at ease. (NEA, Dyad 5)

Other respondents commented, "I felt comfortable giving my opinions on different topics" (NEA, Dyad 40); "I felt like our interactions are becoming less formal and more casual" (NEA, Dyad 40); and "I felt very comfortable talking to him" (EA, Dyad 10). Respondents' comments seemed to indicate that their comfort level continued to increase (i.e., their anxiety decreased) during the third interaction.

By the final interaction, the respondents described how their levels of comfort continued to increase. Two European Americans explained:

I felt very relaxed and comfortable during this interaction. (EA, Dyad 40)

[I was] more relaxed. [My partner], I believe, felt more comfortable, less tired, and thus better able to communicate her interests and thoughts. I responded in kind. (EA, Dyad 25)

The non-European American partners in these dyads noted:

I felt comfortable. (NEA, Dyad 40)

I thought it seemed to be more relaxed this time. It felt like a couple of friends got together just to visit. I think that with every meeting that goes by, I feel more and more comfortable and at ease. (NEA, Dyad 25)

Other respondents commented, "I felt very relaxed and comfortable" (NEA, Dyad 36); "I felt calm, like I was having coffee with friends" (EA, Dyad 24); and "I don't feel nervous or anxious as I did in the first [interaction]" (NEA, Dyad 20). It is evident from respondents' comments that their comfort levels increased over time. In other words, their anxiety levels decreased as they continued to interact with one another.

Respondents' comments indicate that anxiety decreased over time, with the highest levels of anxiety at the first interaction and the lowest levels of anxiety by the fourth interaction. As is the case with uncertainty, these findings are also consistent with AUM theory (Gudykunst, 1995). In addition, the findings parallel those of Hubbert *et al.* (in press) in which the respondents reported highest levels of anxiety at the first interaction and the lowest levels of anxiety by the fourth interaction.

There is some evidence that the respondents experienced anxiety about different aspects of the interaction. For example, respondents described feeling uncomfortable about choosing topics for discussion, their partners' reactions to their self-disclosure, and general anxiety about the interaction overall. This pattern parallels that discovered in uncertainty. Unlike uncertainty, however, there was not a clear pattern in the particular types of anxiety experienced at each interaction point.

Intimacy of Communication. The third theme described by nearly all of the respondents at one interaction point or another was the broad category labeled intimacy of communication. This theme involved providing personal information to the partner.

During the first interaction, respondents were aware of a superficial level of discussion. For example, many respondents referred to this level as the "small talk," "get to know you," and "basic questions" stage in later interactions. Regardless of how the respondents described this stage, the self-disclosure was awkward and superficial as illustrated in the following comments from two European Americans:

I tried to just be myself but not saying too much. I didn't want to mess anything up. I wanted to have a smooth first interaction. (EA, Dyad 16)

During the first interaction, our conversation was minimal and to the point. (EA, Dyad 4)

Comments from some non-European American respondents included:

I just disclosed a little information about myself . (NEA, Dyad 16)

[I was] reluctant to talk. [I] forced myself to ask questions carefully. (NEA, Dyad 15)

Other respondents wrote, "He just disclosed general information about himself" (NEA, Dyad 16); "[I disclosed] very superficial personal information (work and scholastic background)" (NEA, Dyad 13); and "She just asked the basic questions" (EA, Dyad 36). As evidenced by the respondents' comments, self-disclosure during the first interaction involved superficial topics and seemed to exhibit a lack of confidence in the respondents.

By the second interaction, some respondents were becoming more confident and discussed more personal issues with their partners. Two European American respondents explained:

We were beginning to self-disclose more. It is helping our relationship grow. (EA, Dyad 26)

We were able to bypass introductions and instead talk to each other about what came to mind. What we talked about wasn't superficial but [was] getting more personal. (EA, Dyad 12)

Two non-European Americans noted:

During the first interaction, we mainly introduced ourselves. In this interaction, we talked about things such as sports, our relationships (both broken off), food, job, things that we expect in the future. (NEA, Dyad 26)

I seemed to be a little more open with them about my opinions, thoughts, and feelings. I was relaxed. (NEA, Dyad 25)

Other respondents commented, "We were more open with each other" (NEA, Dyad 6); "We were a bit more personal toward each other" (EA, Dyad 8); "The first interaction was the ice breaker. I noticed that [in this interaction] he opened up more and started talking more" (EA, Dyad 13); "I was getting to know her more as a friend [rather] than [just] somebody in class" (EA, Dyad 16); and "We got more personal and asked more detailed questions of each other" (NEA, Dyad 42). When examining respondents' comments from interaction two, it becomes evident that they began increasing the intimacy of their communication and also began progressing beyond superficial topics of conversation.

During the third interaction, the trend toward discussing increasingly more personal topics continued. Two European Americans wrote:

It was different just slightly because it was more intimate. We talk like we've been friends for awhile. Also, it is just natural to feel closer with added interactions. (EA, Dyad 3)

This interaction was different in terms of freer, lighter disclosure (i.e., life's normal "ups and downs"). That fact that it was different, I'm sure, is due to "knowing" each other a shade better. (EA, Dyad 25)

The corresponding non-European American partners commented:

The more we met, the more we talked, shared, disclosed, etc. The interactions kept getting longer and longer. They now seem like we're doing this for ourselves instead of [feeling] like we had to get together. (NEA, Dyad 3)

The communication was different this time from last time because we brought our opinions into it. We seemed to have gotten a little bit more in-depth. We shared more thoughts and feelings this time around. (NEA, Dyad 25)

Other respondents explained, "Our interaction was mostly focused on personal information. I liked this interaction much better" (EA, Dyad 36); "This time, my feelings were that I was with somebody who is my friend" (NEA, Dyad 26); and "We talked about intimate and personal things. [The discussion was] not as superficial. [We] got down to specifics" (NEA, Dyad 7). Respondents' comments during the third interaction reveal that the intimacy of their communication continued to increase and the topics of self-disclosure were more in-depth.

By the final interaction, many respondents considered themselves friends². Two European Americans explained:

This interaction was different than the previous in that I feel we felt that we had pretty much hit the limit of a friend relationship. I think for our relationship and communication to get any deeper than we have gone, we would have to take it more to a close friend level. All in all, we've become friends, and I like her very much. I am glad I got along with her so well. (EA, Dyad 17)

We talked about things that were important to me and things that I feel strongly about.
(EA, Dyad 3)

The non-European partners in these dyads commented:

[The interaction was] different as I never felt better and satisfied during our [other] interactions. I was me, the true me--no pressure, no mask, and no uncertainties because I felt like I know her and related to her ingroup. (NEA, Dyad 17)

I felt free to talk about my personal thoughts and feelings toward issues. I felt as if we got along great. (NEA, Dyad 3)

Other respondents added, "[This interaction] was more intimate. [We both] feel comfortable with each other, so more intimate self-disclosure is safe" (EA, Dyad 35); "Our communication was interesting and in-depth. We discussed personal things that we felt uncomfortable disclosing during the first interaction" (NEA, Dyad 7); "We just talked like friends" (NEA, Dyad 22); and "[This interaction] was more in-depth and interesting" (EA, 7). These comments illustrate that the partners continued to experience more intimate communication than at previous points in time.

Respondents' comments describing the intimacy of their communication and their patterns of self-disclosure reveal a consistency with Altman and Taylor's (1973) social penetration theory. Altman and Taylor (1973) outlined four stages in relationship development: orientation, exploratory affective exchange, affective exchange, and stable exchange. The indications from the respondents are that the majority of their relationships reached the second stage, and a few of the dyads may have reached the third stage. Some respondents described the characteristics of the orientation (e.g., first) stage, or the "distant acquaintances at a cocktail party" stage. Their interactions were characterized by expected responses and limited verbal interactions. Although the majority of the dyads progressed beyond this level, some respondents' descriptions indicate that they remained in this stage. The majority of the respondents appeared to have reached the exploratory affective exchange (e.g., stage two) or the "friendly neighbor" level. Altman and Taylor (1973) described this stage as being friendly, relaxed, and casual. The exploratory affective exchange stage of relationship development appears to describe many of the relationships which developed between dyadic partners.

The few dyads in which the partners appeared to reach the affective exchange stage (e.g., stage three) provided comments which were characteristic of this level of friendship. The respondents in these dyads repeatedly described the intimate nature of their self disclosure, their increased comfort with one another, the elimination of barriers, and the smoothness of their interactions.

The findings of this study also support the qualitative findings of Hubbert *et al.* (in press) in that the increased amount and intimacy of self-disclosure was used as a means of relationship progression. This study, however, provides additional insight into how the intergroup relationships developed over time because it more clearly portrays how the respondents

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progressed from discussing superficial topics during the first interaction to discussing more personal and intimate topics during the fourth interaction.

Finally, it is important to note that not all dyads experienced intimate communication. Unreciprocated self-disclosure, for example, appeared to be the cause of conflict in one dyad. In addition, other respondents noted that there were a few occasions when one partner would reveal information that the other person perceived as too personal for that particular point in time. Comments from the partners in one dyad illustrate both of these points. The European American explained:

Once again, I wasn't asked anything about myself, nor was I given a chance to explain my responses to situations he spoke of concerning [European Americans] with the attitude that he knew who I was and what I thought. (EA, Dyad 19)

The non-European American partner wrote:

I felt this girl talked too much. She did most of the talking . . . The other person talked considerably and I was astonished in part. The astonishment was not so much because she talked so much, but rather the personal items being discussed. (NEA, Dyad 19)

The unequal levels of self-disclosure appeared to result in one partner revealing information that was considered too personal. In addition, resentment seemed to be present in both individuals, albeit for different reasons.

Stereotypes. The fourth theme described by the majority of the dyads at one interaction time or another was labeled stereotypes. This theme was defined as the use of categorical labels (both positive and negative) to which expectations for behavior were attached. Many of the stereotypes identified concerned ethnicity (e.g., Latino/Latina), social group memberships (e.g., sororities), age, or sex (i.e., male/female).

In order to describe the pattern which seemed to evolve over time, respondents' comments from each interaction point are presented here. After the first interaction, two European Americans reported:

When [my partner] and I met for the first time, I spoke slowly and wasn't sure if he could understand what I was asking [because I knew he was from a different culture]. I use slang words sometimes and don't realize it until I get a puzzled look on the person's face. (EA, Dyad 13)

Since he was ESL [English as a second language], I tended to explain myself better than normal. (EA, Dyad 27)

Two non-European Americans wrote:

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My stereotypes of [European Americans] in California are that they are very open minded and have learned to deal with many different kinds of people. As a result, I felt at ease when communicating with him. (NEA, Dyad 13)

[My partner] was assumed to be an older person--a senior citizen. I showed respect for her because of her age and, therefore, tried to talk carefully around her trying not to affect [the] "old" morals she held. (NEA, Dyad 34)

Other respondents wrote, "I thought he would be a very strong-minded Latino male. He turned out to be very soft spoken. I was not as forward in conversation as I might have been otherwise" (EA, Dyad 26); "I thought she lived close with her family [and] studied some kind of art study (not business or accounting) and loved alternative music" (EA, Dyad 42); and "I stereotype people from Oregon as having a negative view of people from California. I asked her about it" (EA, Dyad 32). After reviewing the above excerpts, it is clear that stereotypes--both positive and negative--were activated.

During the second interaction, two European American respondents described the process of comparing their partners' behavior to their stereotypes by stating:

I constantly compared him in my mind to other [Latinos] I've encountered. He was not at all like them. My stereotypes did make me anxious and influenced my intentions. (EA, Dyad 18)

The stereotype I had of [him] was that he didn't speak or understand English that well because he was from Mexico. That stereotype was soon proven wrong after a brief conversation with him. (EA, Dyad 13)

The corresponding non-European partners explained:

In a sense, I expected to hear some of the derogatories towards [Latinos]. This helped me interact with her once the topic was on. My stereotypes of her I derived from the recent trend going on across America, i.e., Proposition 187, Affirmative Action, and . . . English-only laws. (NEA, Dyad 18)

After the first interaction, I really think that my stereotypes were reinforced. (EA, Dyad 13)

Other respondents added, "She still didn't fit my stereotype of a Latina/American Indian" (EA, Dyad 31); and "I had told her about my friend because he does not fit the stereotype of what a young [African American] can do, and I wanted her to know that stereotypes weren't an issue with our communication" (EA, Dyad 38). These examples illustrate that the respondents consistently described the process of comparing their partners' behavior to the stereotypes they had activated.

During the third interaction, the respondents began to state that the stereotypes they held were no longer affecting their communication. Some of the respondents, however, were still

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comparing their partners' behavior with their stereotypical expectations. Two European Americans wrote:

The stereotype of her being [Latina] didn't affect how I communicated with her [now] because during the interaction, I forgot all about it. (EA, Dyad 3)

By this time, I tried to disregard my stereotypes about her. She turned out very different from my expectations. (EA, Dyad 8)

The non-European American partners commented:

I now realize that we are the same. I had my stereotypes of him being handed down money and so on, but [he] works hard for it. (NEA, Dyad 8)

My stereotypes were set aside in order to learn more about the person. (NEA, Dyad 21)

Other respondents noted, "My [reliance on] stereotypes decreased" (EA, Dyad 16); "Because he didn't fit my stereotypes, they didn't really affect this interaction" (EA, Dyad 26); and "After talking with him, [I realized] the stereotype [I had] was incorrect . . . [The] stereotype I had of him did change after this interaction was completed" (EA, Dyad 13). As shown in these comments, the majority of the respondents at interaction three began to describe the fact that they were no longer relying on stereotypes to predict their partners' behavior, as well as their indications that stereotypes were having little impact on their communication.

By the final interaction, the respondents continued to describe the lessening impact of stereotypes on their communication. Two European Americans noted:

The stereotypes were becoming less and less on my mind. I was talking to him more as an individual than a [Latino] now, though I did learn a lot about his culture. (EA, Dyad 18)

Our communication wasn't affected by [stereotypes] that much. We both have a pretty good idea about each other by now as stereotypes are disappearing. (EA, Dyad 42)

Two non-European Americans noted:

I did not really have many stereotypes [at this point]. I simply thought she really wanted to know more about me and perhaps the only stereotype I may have had at this point is that I thought maybe she knew too little about me but it was a remote feeling. (NEA, Dyad 18)

Almost all stereotypes were broken down. It almost seemed silly to remember the labels I had once placed on her since these were broken down or broadened. (NEA, Dyad 35)

Other respondents explained, "She definitely didn't fit the stereotype I had of her" (EA, Dyad 3); "As I get to know [my partner], he does not fit my stereotypes of his culture. My stereotypes, therefore, did not really affect our communication" (EA, Dyad 26); and "My stereotype has disappeared as we have spent considerable time together" (EA, Dyad 33). By the fourth interaction, nearly all of the respondents believed stereotypes were no longer impacting their communication.

As individuals begin to interact with strangers, the use of stereotypes is a necessary aspect of communication (Gudykunst & Kim, 1992). With repeated interaction, however, individuals become more confident of their ability to make predictions and, thus, decrease their reliance on stereotypes. Gudykunst and Kim (1992) also explain that when stereotypes are activated, "we assume that our expectations are correct and behave as though they are. We, therefore, try to confirm our expectations when we communicate with members of other groups" (p. 93).

The results of this study appear to be consistent with Hubbert *et al.*'s (in press) study in which respondents reported that positive expectations increased over time. When contemplating the negative expectations often associated with negative stereotypes, it appears that these negative expectations became neutral or positive by the fourth interaction. Alternatively, they saw their partners as "exceptions to the rule" (i.e., as persons who do not fit the stereotypes). Respondents consistently described the fact that they were no longer relying on stereotypical predictions for their partners' behavior because they had focused on the personal aspects of their relationships. This pattern is similar to that discussed in the theme of intimacy of communication in which the respondents described how they discussed superficial topics in the first interaction and talked about more intimate topics by the fourth interaction. It may be that the respondents used stereotypes more during the first interaction and compared their partners' behavior with the stereotypical expectations during the second and third interactions. As the relationships progressed, the respondents saw their partners less as typical members of their groups and more as individuals.

Similarities. The fifth theme identified in this study, similarities, was mentioned by nearly all of the respondents at one interaction point or another. This theme was defined as the identification of aspects the respondents had in common. Often, the respondents discussed their dissimilarities, or the differences between them.

During the first interaction, most of the respondents identified background or lifestyle similarities, followed by personality or physical characteristic similarities. Only one respondent discussed attitude, opinion, or belief similarities at the first interaction. After the first interaction, two European American respondents wrote:

[My partner] and I are one year apart in age. [We] both work full time and go to school part time. Both of us went to a junior college prior to attending [this university]. He is married, I am not. (EA, Dyad 13)

We are close in age, [and are] are all living on [our] own (supporting selves). (EA, Dyad 26)

The corresponding non-European American partners added:

We both shared higher education aspirations, [and] we live in the same type of community. The big difference would be mainly our origins. (NEA, Dyad 13)

[Our similarities included] our majors, the kinds of jobs that we have held. We work only 15 hours a week, [and] we both live on our own. (NEA, Dyad 26)

Other respondents wrote, "We both come from close families" (EA, Dyad 9); "We both spent a semester studying abroad" (EA, Dyad 7); "Our lifestyles [are similar]" (EA, Dyad 16); and "We are both students, like communication, and live in the same kind of environment" (NEA, Dyad 12). The above comments illustrate the respondents' identification of similarities pertaining to their lifestyles and/or backgrounds.

During the second interaction, the identification of background and lifestyle similarities increased, while personality/physical similarities decreased significantly. In addition, attitude/opinion/belief similarities increased. Sample comments from two European Americans included:

Both [my partner] and I are high achievers. We want high grades, [and] we love to read. She can pull all nighters, whereas I can't stay up studying past 10:00 p.m. (EA, Dyad 14)

I noticed we feel the same about today's music scene and what music is all about. But, we disagreed on our tastes. I listen to older music [and] she listens to mainly newer music. (EA, Dyad 42)

The non-European American partners commented:

We both [shared a] concern for the making of good grades, but she felt less pressure [to perform]. (NEA, Dyad 14)

The similarities we had were that we both like music a lot, see concerts a lot, and go down to Los Angeles often. Our dissimilarities were in music tastes. When first encountering him, I thought he would like more of the [same] music [that] I did [because] I had seen him once at a school concert. Yet, he likes a different style of music. (NEA, Dyad 42)

Other respondents explained, "I recognized that we had some similar views on quotas in the workplace and affirmative action" (EA, Dyad 39); "We both have a strong work ethic" (EA, Dyad 18); "We both want to get ahead, want the good things in life" (NEA, Dyad 18); and "[We both] had some opinions about people with handicaps and those who take care of people with handicaps" (NEA, Dyad 25). The above comments illustrate that the respondents were beginning to delve deeper into their attitude/opinion/belief similarities and focused less on their background/lifestyle similarities.

During the third interaction, background/lifestyle similarities decreased significantly, while attitude/opinion/belief similarities increased slightly. Recognition of personality/physical similarities more than doubled at the third interaction. Sample comments from two European Americans included:

[More] similarities than dissimilarities were indicated as we seemed to share the same views and opinions on what we discussed. (EA, Dyad 25)

We have similar views on some political issues and values. (EA, Dyad 3)

The non-European American partners responded:

We seemed to agree on the affirmative action issues. We shared the same views, thoughts, and opinions. (NEA, Dyad 25)

We shared the same opinions that stereotypes were sometimes good for us for our own security when interacting with strangers. We had different feelings on divorce. (NEA, Dyad 40)

Respondents' comments illustrate the importance placed on attitude/opinion/belief similarities during the third interaction. Other respondents wrote, "We seemed to agree on the affirmative action issues" (EA, Dyad 24); and "We had similar feelings about religion" (Dyad, 31). Additional examples of respondents' comments concerning personality/physical similarities included, "We both noticed we were wearing almost the exact same outfit" (EA, Dyad 36); "I found our tastes in clothes somewhat similar" (NEA, Dyad 42); "[He] seems to be a sensitive, caring person. I also try to be this way" (EA, Dyad 26); and "She seems very genuine and caring, and these are qualities I feel I share with her" (EA, Dyad 11). These comments illustrate that the identification of similarities continued throughout the third interaction and that the types of similarities identified were becoming more personal.

During the fourth interaction, background/lifestyle similarities and attitude/opinion/belief similarities remained at approximately the same levels as indicated in the third interaction. The identification of personality/physical similarities, however, declined in much the same manner as it had in the second interaction. Some European American respondents noted:

We're both interested in doing well in our classes and making a better life for ourselves. We both value our family and relationships. (EA, Dyad 18)

I did not notice a lot of dissimilarities. The Vietnamese have a sense of family that I really admire and agree with. (EA, Dyad 40)

The non-European American partners wrote:

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I noticed more similarities than dissimilarities, especially when it came to immigration control. (NEA, Dyad 18)

We were from two different cultures, but we still had the same concept about family values. (NEA, Dyad 40)

Additional respondents' comments included, "Similar expectations were expressed in spousal expectations. We [both] pictured a fairy tale lifestyle" (NEA, Dyad 35); "We have had similar experiences in dealing with friends who have recently been married or have new boyfriends" (NEA, Dyad 6); and "The similarities [we had] were [our beliefs] that females need to be more outspoken and independent in their relationships and that marriage is scary" (EA, Dyad 5). When reviewing respondents' comments after the fourth interaction, it is apparent that the majority of the respondents continued to identify similarities at all points of interaction.

The results of this theme are consistent with Hubbert *et al.* (in press), Sudweeks *et al.* (1990), Gudykunst *et al.* (1991), and Kertamus *et al.* (1991). All of these studies demonstrated that respondents identify various types of similarities in their intergroup relationships. The types of similarities identified in these studies were labeled as cultural, background/lifestyle, and attitude/interest similarities.

Quality of Communication. The final theme described by the all of the respondents at one interaction point or another was labeled quality of communication. This theme was defined through respondents' comments as being descriptions of whether their communication had been effective.

During the first interaction, nearly all of the respondents reported that they experienced effective communication. The majority of respondents alluded to non-verbal communication as the prime indicator of successful communication, followed by self-disclosure. Other main reasons for effective communication given by the respondents included understanding one another, lost track of time while interacting, careful listening, equal turn-taking, and a lack of silence. Two European Americans commented:

I felt my communication was effective. I looked for facial expressions and comments for clues. Also, by asking questions I could see if I was being heard at all. (EA, Dyad 24)

[Our communication was] effective. Eye contact told me that she was interested. The fact that she offered a lot of information told me she was willing to share. Smiles also showed me it was an effective interaction. (EA, Dyad 9)

The non-European American partners explained:

[Our communication was] effective. He listened to me attentively. (NEA, Dyad 24)

She listened and asked questions. She seemed pretty interested, and there never was a quiet moment between our interactions, so I guess you can say we had a very effective interaction. (NEA, Dyad 9)

Other respondents' comments included, "I think our communication was effective. I looked for non-verbal cues such as eye contact [and] a nod of the head as to whether he was listening or not" (EA, Dyad 40); "I thought our communication was effective. [We] kept eye contact and we asked questions back-and-forth, making sure we understand each other" (EA, Dyad 12); "The effective communication cues were based just on the discussion. The more elaborate they were, the more the discussion seemed to just flow and go with ease" (EA, Dyad 41); "I feel our communication was effective. We got along, listened to each other, asked questions" (NEA, Dyad 37); and "My communication was very effective. I left the session feeling very comfortable and satisfied with all of the information that was shared" (EA, Dyad 8). When examining respondents' comments at interaction one, it is clear that respondents relied heavily on the non-verbal aspects of communication and self-disclosure to gauge effectiveness.

During the second interaction, respondents continued to indicate that their communication was effective. Again, non-verbal cues and the amount of self-disclosure were the most frequently mentioned reasons or indicators. The smoothness of the interaction appeared to be more prominent at the second interaction. Other indicators of effectiveness included paraphrasing, listening, a lack of silence, and the identification of similarities. In response to the second interaction, two European Americans commented:

I believe it was effective based on her verbal responses and body language. (EA, Dyad 25)

I always look at a person's facial movements as well as the way they sit and how they respond when I talk. There is a barrier in communicating with him--so sometimes I repeat myself as well as asking him to repeat himself. Communication is effective. (EA, Dyad 40)

The non-European American partners in these dyads reported:

I felt my communication was effective. The cues I used were how the person reacted to my opinions, my stories, and thoughts. She seemed to be interested, so I took that as effective communication. (NEA, Dyad 25)

I felt that my communication was effective through the paraphrases and sharing of experience of my partner. (NEA, Dyad 40)

Other respondents commented, "I gained more confidence and took turns during our interaction" (NEA, Dyad 17); "I thought [our communication] was effective. I asked questions and looked [at] facial expressions for clues" (EA, Dyad 42); "Communication was effective because we [both] took turns talking, made eye contact, and were very comfortable with each other" (NEA, Dyad 20); and "Our communication is very effective. When one stops talking, it's a cue for [the other person] to begin talking. We use a lot of eye contact when we talk to each other" (NEA, Dyad 21). Respondents' comments reveal a continued reliance on the non-verbal aspects of communication

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and the amount and depth of self-disclosure, as well as the smoothness of the interaction, to describe effective communication during the second interaction.

During the third interaction, the majority of the respondents continued to be satisfied with the quality of their communication. Once more, the primary reasons were the amount and quality of self-disclosure and the non-verbal indicators. An explanation for the quality of communication which appeared to increase in significance at the third interaction was the identification of similarities. The issue of turn-taking seemed to decrease in importance at this interaction. Reliance on other, aforementioned indicators (e.g., listening, agreement, understanding) remained constant. Comments from two European American respondents after the third interaction included:

Our communication was effective. There was a good flow of conversation and positive body language. (EA, Dyad 39)

I felt our communication was effective because even though he was being asked all the questions, if I needed a more clear answer or didn't understand something, I would ask him to clarify for me. I used more good eye contact and nodding to assure him I understood. (EA, Dyad 12)

The non-European American partners wrote:

I believe communication was a lot better due to the frank discussion he and I had the previous interaction. We were able to discuss our feelings regarding the racial issues and the class dynamics which were the source of my reticence and lack of enthusiasm. (NEA, Dyad 39)

Our communication was effective once more. I thought that we covered a lot of ground in a very short 30 minutes. (NEA, Dyad 12)

Other respondents explained, "[I] felt communication was effective on the basis of her verbal and non-verbal responses and willingness to talk" (EA, Dyad 25); "My communication was effective. I looked at her while I talked to pick up cues from her to see if she was in line with everything I was saying" (EA, Dyad 17); and "I feel at this point this was the most effective communication we have had. We both made a real effort to converse and found we had a lot in common" (NEA, Dyad 37). After the third interaction, respondents continued to rely on non-verbal communication and self-disclosure as indicators of the quality of their communication.

During the fourth interaction, the main indicators were again self-disclosure and non-verbal indicators, however, there seemed to be a slight decline in the number of respondents referring to the non-verbal aspects of communication. Two European American respondents at the fourth interaction commented:

[Our communication was] effective. We could have even carried the conversation further. (EA, Dyad 6)

Our communication was very effective. It was personal, it was intimate, and we laughed. (EA, Dyad 5)

The non-European American partners wrote:

We were much more at ease Our conversation was really free flowing. We were both contributing and our communication was very easy. We were much more personal. (NEA, Dyad 6)

[Our communication was] effective. We were basically carrying on a conversation without really trying. (NEA, dyad 5)

Other respondents wrote, "I felt [our communication] was effective. We laughed a lot, shared a lot" (NEA, Dyad 3); "[Our communication] was effective. We got along real good. That was my cue that it was effective" (EA, Dyad 3); "We learned something about each other's personal life, so I felt [communication] was effective" (Ea, Dyad 20); and "Communication was effective based on the fluidity and interest in our conversation and our responses verbally and non-verbally" (EA, Dyad 25). The slight increase in reliance on self-disclosure and reduction in the importance of non-verbal aspects at the fourth interaction are evident in the above respondents' comments.

The results of this study are consistent with Duck *et al.* (1991), Gudykunst and Shapiro (1996), and Knapp, Ellis, and Williams (1980). For example, Duck *et al.* (1991) reported that in order for communication to be considered effective, it must be relaxed, smooth, and open. In addition, they note that quality of communication increases when partners exhibit understanding and attentiveness and when communication breakdowns are minimal. Duck *et al.* (1991) also note that the quality of communication increases as relationships become more intimate.

The results of this study indicate that respondents perceived their communication to consistently be effective over all four interaction points. At first glance, this finding initially appears to be inconsistent with previous research which showed that the effectiveness of communication increased as relationships become more intimate (e.g., Hubbert *et al.*, in press). However, the respondents did describe an increase in effectiveness over time. In other words, the communication at the fourth interaction seemed to be more effective than the communication at the first interaction, even though the communication at both instances was labeled effective.

One possible explanation for this finding may be that it parallels the pattern described in the intimacy of communication theme. More specifically, during the first interaction, the respondents described their communication as effective. Respondents' comments during the first interaction, however, reveal a reliance on non-verbal aspects, smoothness of interaction, and so forth. As the interactions progressed, the indicators of effectiveness became more in-depth. What may be most important during the first interaction (e.g., strained-relaxed, difficult-smooth) may no longer be as important by the fourth interaction (e.g., great deal of misunderstanding-great deal of understanding, listening-attentive). In addition, many respondents described their communication

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as effective when their partners agreed with them on issues or when they were able to identify similarities.

Finally, it is important to note that although the majority of the respondents reported successful or high quality communication, there were a few dyads in which the communication was less effective. Factors (described in other themes) such as anxiety, uncertainty, or unequal turn-taking seemed to affect the respondents' perceptions of effective communication. Again, respondents' perceptions differed. In one dyad, the European American wrote:

My communication was effective [because] she appeared to understand everything I said, and she was very responsive. (EA, Dyad 17)

The non-European American partner, however, explained:

[Our communication] was ineffective because I didn't take much turn in the conversation . . . I still did not know her, so I hesitated to take turns in conversation a little. (NEA, Dyad 17)

In another dyad, problems with the quality of communication seemed to arise when the respondents experienced difficulty identifying topics about which to talk. In this dyad, the European American commented:

During the [first] interaction, we had more to talk about. We talked about our jobs and school. During this interaction, we didn't seem to have anything to talk about. (EA, Dyad 36)

The non-European American partner stated:

I felt my communication was ineffective. In fact, I feel we both were ineffective to some degree because this encounter did not go smoothly. (NEA, Dyad 36)

In one final example, the presence of conflict seemed to adversely impact the quality of communication. One European American wrote:

My communication had, really, in my opinion, continued its stifled or argumentative--and at this point, non-existent--presence even at this point. Please understand, he is just very passionate about his background and ethnicity. I am starting to realize that Americans have, perhaps, made him feel the constant need to explain himself. It was hard to be effective when every time I spoke, I was cut off. He basically called me flaky and unorganized. I'm frustrated to no end. (EA, Dyad 19)

The non-European American partner explained:

I don't think the communication was effective. It was more debating and argumentation. (NEA, Dyad 19)

The above comments illustrate that not all respondents experienced high quality communication with their partners.

Interrelationships Among Themes

Spradley (1979) argues that themes serve as subsystems of meaning. In addition, he explains that although meaning exists in various major and minor themes, these themes ultimately connect the different concepts to which they refer. When examining the data resulting from this study, evidence of the interrelationships among the themes was found. The interrelationships revealed in this study also provide insight into anxiety/uncertainty management processes.

Although there was not sufficient evidence meeting the recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness criteria (Owen, 1984) to consider identity a separate theme as defined throughout this study, it can be used as a framework for showing the interrelationships among the themes. More specifically, the use of identity as a framework allows the discussion to progress from the standpoint of the use of social identities, followed by the identification of similarities and the use of personal identities.

When communicating with strangers (i.e., primarily intergroup communication), research has shown that individuals tend to use their social identities (Gudykunst, 1995; Turner, 1987). A review of respondents' comments revealed that some participants described the use of their social identities (most often in the first interaction). Two respondents wrote, "I presented myself socially" (EA, Dyad 37); and "I think we all used our student identities to get through the first interaction" (EA, Dyad 39). Additionally, many respondents in this study described the process of activating stereotypes and asking questions about their partners' ethnicity or culture. The fact that the respondents engaged in this process provides evidence that they were basing their communication on their social identities, even though that was not explicitly stated.

As individuals initially interact with strangers, they base their communication on their social identities. In addition, their levels of uncertainty and anxiety are high, they rely on stereotypes to predict strangers' behavior, and they engage in superficial communication. One European American respondent described his anxiety, uncertainty, and the intimacy of communication:

At first, [communication] was ineffective because of all the uncertainty and awkwardness. But at the end [of the second interaction] we were able to talk openly about [the] last [interaction] and [discuss] what we were thinking. It clarified a lot of things for me and made me feel more secure. (EA, Dyad 52)

As the respondent began interacting with his partner, he experienced increased uncertainty and anxiety (i.e., his uncertainty and anxiety may have been above his maximum threshold) and alluded that there was a lack of intimate communication in the first interaction. As he continued to interact with his partner, they discussed more personal topics. Consequently, he experienced a decrease in his uncertainty and anxiety (i.e., his uncertainty and anxiety were below his maximum threshold).

As individuals continue interacting with strangers, they disclose information about themselves (progressing toward the use of a personal identity) and, if all is going well, the

strangers do the same (norm of reciprocity; Gouldner, 1960). In addition, the individuals begin to identify similarities between the strangers and themselves. This identification of similarities helps individuals realize that they are not as different from the strangers as they initially thought. When individuals identify similarities with strangers, their uncertainty and anxiety decrease, they reduce their reliance on stereotypes to predict strangers' behavior, they move away from basing their communication on their social identities and begin to base their communication more on their personal identities. Some respondents discussed the effect identifying similarities had on their levels of comfort:

[Our communication] was effective because we got along real well. After I realized she wasn't different from me, we got to know each other. It seems we will be good friends. (EA, Dyad 3)

I felt very comfortable with her because we had things in common. (NEA, Dyad 36)

At the beginning of the meeting, I felt more relaxed with him because we discussed in the first meeting that we had some similarities/things in common. I felt as though I could relate to him easier. (EA, Dyad 12)

As respondents identified similarities with their partners, they realized their partners were not as different from them as they had initially thought. Because they were similar, they were more at ease and experienced a reduction in their anxiety (e.g., their anxiety was below their maximum thresholds).

While communicating with strangers, individuals compare the strangers' behavior with the stereotypes they hold to see whether the strangers meet the expectations. Eventually, the individuals conclude that the strangers either meet the stereotypical expectations (e.g., stereotype is confirmed) or the strangers behave differently than expected and cause the individuals to adjust their thinking about the strangers (e.g., stereotype is disconfirmed). If the stereotype is disconfirmed, the individuals begin to view the stranger as a person and not a group member. Some respondents described the reduction in the reliance of stereotypes and the increased use of their personal identities. They wrote:

I'm glad I got on a personal level with him because now I can put the stereotypes aside and get to know him as himself. (NEA, Dyad 8)

Our communication was different because I had created a totally new stereotype and saw her as more of an equal. This was realized by the personal information I was disclosing to her. (EA, Dyad 44)

The stereotypes are not engaged now. I am approaching her as an individual. (EA, Dyad 7)

As respondents began to realize that their partners did not fit their stereotypical expectations, they relaxed (e.g., felt more comfortable), and began to base their communication more on their personal identities.

There is some evidence of an interrelationship between the themes of similarity and stereotypes. Some respondents commented on the idea that the identification of similarities helped reduce their reliance on stereotypes. Two respondents wrote:

As I have had three interactions with her, her stereotypes did not affect me anymore because I recognized that she had beliefs and feelings similar to me. Thus, she was an individual who stood out from her community. (NEA, Dyad 40)

I can identify with the independent nature. I'm that way too. . . . The stereotypes allowed the beginning of a search for commonalities. (EA, Dyad 35)

The identification of similarities appears to have helped respondents realize that they were not as different as they had initially thought. Hence, because the respondents viewed their partners as similar to themselves, they no longer needed to rely on stereotypes to make predictions. Clearly, the identification of similarities appears to be a crucial element in the anxiety/uncertainty management process.

When communicating with friends or intimate partners, individuals rely on their personal identities (i.e., primarily interpersonal communication; Gudykunst, 1995; Turner, 1987). Some respondents described the use of personal identities by the fourth interaction, and other respondents' comments allude to the use of personal identities. To illustrate, three respondents wrote, "We were much more personal" (NEA, Dyad 5); "I was comfortable with very personal self-disclosure" (EA, Dyad 35); and "[This interaction was] very casual, more personal" (NEA, Dyad 23).

As individuals continue to interact with strangers and begin basing their communication on their personal identities, they experience an increase in the identification of similarities, decreases in uncertainty and anxiety, and increases in the intimacy and quality of communication. Several respondents described the interrelationship between comfort, intimacy of communication, and the use of personal identities:

Our interactions are becoming more personal. This is different because our first interaction was somewhat uncomfortable. As time went on, they became less uncomfortable. (EA, Dyad 40)

Our communication was different because . . . I was getting to know her based on personal information (as opposed to group information). (EA, Dyad 44)

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I felt that because I knew her a little bit [better], I was comfortable talking with her. It was different because I identified [with] her personally. (EA, Dyad 45)

As respondents felt more comfortable, they engaged in communication based on their personal identities and perceived more intimate communication.

As the interactions become deeper, so does the intimacy of communication. In the beginning, the interactants may discuss the number of siblings they have, the classes they are taking, and so forth. As they become more comfortable with their partners, and as they see their partners as individuals with whom they have things in common, the interactants begin to disclose their personal opinions, their belief systems, and their goals for the future. If the self-disclosure is reciprocated, the individuals continue to progress toward a deeper level of relationship, continuing to identify and disclose various aspects of their personal identities.

Conclusion

Past research has revealed much about intergroup communication and relationship development. Less is known, however, about intergroup communication over time or intergroup relationship development. By combining the quantitative findings of past studies (e.g., Hubbert *et al.*, in press) with the more extensive qualitative findings of this study, researchers can more fully tap the subtle nuances of change in uncertainty, anxiety, the use of stereotypes, intimacy of communication, the identification of similarities, and the quality of communication. When we know more about how to manage these processes over time, we can prepare future scholars and business executives by providing more finely-tuned training programs. If nothing else, however, these combined studies can lead us to tolerate differences and promote understanding in our everyday intergroup encounters.

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Notes

¹ The number of respondents is slightly inflated since there was an imbalance in the numbers of European American and non-European American respondents. There were some triads [i.e., two European Americans and one non-European American] communicating at points in time. Each non-European American completed two diary entries, one for his or her interaction with each of the European Americans. For purposes of analysis, these triads were separated into dyads.

² It should be noted that the term friend appears to have been used as a general label for relationships which were friendly, not necessarily indicating close relationships that would continue over time.

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