Relational Dialectics

- Baxter and Montgomery analyzed tensions in romantic relationships and began cataloging contradictions.
  - Forces that strain relationships among close friends and family members.
  - **Relational dialectics** – dynamic knot of contradictions in personal relationships; unceasing interplay between contrary or opposing tendencies.
Contradiction is a core concept of relational dialectics

- "Dynamic interplay between unified oppositions" (Baxter and Montgomery)
- Draw heavily on Bakhtin who saw dialectic tensions as the "deep structure" of human experience
  - Bakhtin saw dialectic tension as opportunity for dialogue
Contradiction (continued)

- Baxter: communication exerts simultaneous pulls on both ends of a taut line – a relational rope under tension
- Dialectical tension is a natural product, or unavoidable result of our conversations
- Contradictions can be constructive
Figure 11-1: Typical Dialectical Tensions Experienced by Relational Partners

- **Internal Dialectic (within the relationship):**
  - Integration - Separation: Connection – Autonomy
  - Stability - Change: Certainty – Uncertainty
  - Expression - Nonexpression: Openness – Closedness

- **External Dialectic (between couple and community):**
  - Integration - Separation: Inclusion – Seclusion
  - Stability - Change: Conventionality – Uniqueness
  - Expression - Nonexpression: Revelation – Concealment
ASK DR. K

Long Distance Relationships
Some communication scholars question whether *relational dialectics* should be labeled as a theory at all, however, it offers

- New understanding of people
- Community of agreement
- Clarification of values
- Reform of society
- Aesthetic appeal
Bakhtin's Dialogue

Bakhtin saw dialectical tension as an opportunity for dialogue.
RDT 2.0: Drilling Down on Bakhtin’s Concept of Dialogue

- Dialogue as a Constitutive Process
  - Dialogue – communication that is constitutive, always in flux, capable of achieving aesthetic moments
  - Constitutive dialogue – communication that creates, sustains, and alters relationships and social worlds
Let's look at some dialogue about *Friends with Benefits*
Dialogue as an Aesthetic Moment

- **Aesthetic moment** – fleeting sense of unity through a profound respect for disparate voices in dialogue
- It's easy manage a “friends with benefits” relationship if partners just understand the rules
Figure 11-2: The Messiness of Personal Relationships
Dialogue as Dialectical Flux

- **Dialectical flux** – unpredictable, unfinalizable, indeterminate nature of personal relationships
  - **Spiraling inversion** – switching back and forth between two contrasting voices
  - **Segmentation** – compartmentalizing tactic by which partners isolate differ aspects of their relationship
  - I'm your friend OR your lover