

INAPPROPRIATE RELATIONSHIPS

The Unconventional,
the Disapproved,
and the Forbidden



LEA's SERIES
ON PERSONAL
RELATIONSHIPS



Edited by **ROBIN GOODWIN • DUNCAN CRAMER**

Inappropriate Relationships

The Unconventional,
The Disapproved,
&
The Forbidden

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Edited by

Robin Goodwin
Brunel University
and
Duncan Cramer
Loughborough University



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To our inappropriate relationships...

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Foreword

The Series on Personal Relationships from Lawrence Erlbaum Associates is intended to review the progress in the academic work on relationships with respect to a broad array of issues and to do so in an accessible manner that also illustrates its practical value. The LEA series includes books intended to pass on the accumulated scholarship to the next generation of students and to those who deal with relationship issues in the broader world beyond the academy. The series thus not only comprises monographs and other academic resources exemplifying the multidisciplinary nature of this area, but also, in the future, will include textbooks suitable for use in the growing numbers of courses on relationships.

The series has the goal of providing a comprehensive and current survey of theory and research in personal relationships through the careful analysis of the problems encountered and solved in research, yet it also considers the systematic application of that work in a practical context. These resources not only are intended to be comprehensive assessments of progress on particular “hot” and relevant topics, but also will be significant influences on the future directions and development of the study of personal relationships. Although each volume is focused and centered, authors all attempt to place the respective topics in the broader context of other research on relationships and within a range of wider disciplinary traditions. The series already offers incisive and forward-looking reviews and also demonstrates the broader theoretical implications of relationships for the range of disciplines from which the research originates. Present and future volumes include original studies, reviews of relevant theory and research, and new theories oriented toward the understanding of personal relationships both in themselves and within the context of broader theories of family process, social psychology, and communication.

Reflecting the diverse composition of personal relationship study, readers in numerous disciplines—social psychology, communication, sociology, family studies, developmental psychology, clinical psychology, personality, counseling, women’s studies, gerontology, and others—will find valuable and insightful perspectives in the series.

Apart from the academic scholars who research the dynamics and processes of relationships, there are many other people whose work takes them up against the operation of relationships in the real world. For such people as nurses, police, teachers, therapists, lawyers, drug and alcohol counselors, marital

counselors, and those who take care of the elderly, a number of issues routinely arise concerning the ways in which relationships affect the people whom they serve. Examples are the role of loneliness in illness and the ways to circumvent it, the complex impact of family and peer relationships on a drug-dependent's attempts to give up the drug, the role of playground unpopularity on a child's learning, the issues involved in dealing with the relational side of chronic illness, the management of conflict in marriage, the establishment of good rapport between physicians and seriously ill patients, the support of the bereaved, and the correction of violent styles of behavior in dating or marriage. Each of these is a problem that may confront some of the aforementioned professionals as part of their daily concerns and each demonstrates the far-reaching influences of relationship processes on much else in life that is presently theorized independently of relationship considerations.

The present volume is a case in point because it deals with the very definitions of acceptability in relationships. Our assumptions about the viability of relationships are typically grown in the context of the normative and acceptable. When we talk about "friendship" it is usually understood to be a legitimate friendship between people of equal status and roughly equivalent age, for example. For too long the scholarly research has underplayed the kinds of relationships that step over the boundaries into social sanctions of various levels and strengths and yet, as the chapters in this volume confirm, real-life experiences are quite often in disapproved relationships. These can range from the unconventional to the forbidden. As well as illustrating the nature of these suspect relationships, Robin Goodwin and Duncan Cramer present a compelling case for the relevance of understanding "inappropriate" relationships. This book offers an important scholarly counterweight to others that attempt to draw a misleadingly positive picture of everyday relational lives.

This book shines a light into some dark places and in so doing not only increases our practical understanding of those forms of relationship but also enlightens the comprehension of relational life as a whole.

—Steve Duck
University of Iowa

Preface

In one of the defining euphemisms of our time, an embattled U.S. President, Bill Clinton, admitted to an “inappropriate relationship” with a White House intern, Monica Lewinsky. At the time, neither of us was particularly convinced by the depth of his sorrow, or his rather euphemistic use of the word *inappropriate*. Reflecting on the word *inappropriate* some months later, we realized that ambiguities over what forms an “inappropriate” relationship were far more than a rather diverting insight into the life of a U.S. president, but actually a fundamental, if rarely discussed, distinction for relationship researchers. It led us to question what constituted an “inappropriate relationship,” and to inquire how an understanding of the rules and norms of appropriateness better help us comprehend personal relationships. Continuing our conversation with others in the personal relationships field soon led us to appreciate that what constitutes an “inappropriate” relationship is more than a simple argument about moral behavior—it actually raises a whole series of relational and cultural issues rarely discussed by those working in a field still dominated by the analysis of the (relatively) happy, consensual, undergraduate couple.

This book includes a wide range of contributions that examine the personal and dyadic boundaries of relationships (the negotiated rules that help define acceptable interaction within a romantic dyad of friendship), the norms and taboos demarcated by particular social groups (such as we might find across social class and religious and ethnic groupings), and the wider societal stipulations, whether enshrined in legal frameworks or not, that serve to prohibit particular liaisons. We have attempted to bring together something of the diversity of the concept of “inappropriate relationships” by recruiting authors from a variety of perspectives, including communications, sociology, psychoanalytic studies, and social and clinical psychology. We asked each author, an expert in his or her respective field, to consider a range of questions, including who it is that defines the relationship as inappropriate, why the relationship they describe is considered “inappropriate” and what functions this may serve, for how long (historically) the relationship has been defined as such, and whether or not this is a universal definition across groups and cultures. By doing so, we aimed to examine the power struggles and negotiations that might occur when different individuals or groups fail to see their relationship as “inappropriate,” and to explore the manner in which different individuals and

groups may buffer themselves against sanctions or even encourage censure as an agent of change.

The book is divided into five sections. The first, entitled “Conceptualizing Inappropriate Relationships,” considers theoretical approaches to issues of inappropriateness. In the opening chapter of this volume, Steve Duck and Lise VanderVoort offer a useful conceptual framework for thinking about inappropriate relationships and relational behavior in general, into which the more specific aspects discussed in the sections that follow can be viewed. A particular theoretical perspective for defining inappropriateness, that of evolutionary psychology, is proposed by Pam Regan in the other chapter of this introductory section, which reviews research on the qualities individuals seek in their romantic partner or mate.

Section II contains three chapters, each of which examines a different aspect of what some may consider to be inappropriate in marital relationships. Graham Allan and Kaeran Harrison discuss their thematic analysis of the written comments about “having an affair” made by participants in the British Mass-Observation Archive. Focusing primarily on Black-White romantic relationships in the United States, Stanley Gaines and Jennifer Leaver outline the way in which individuals in such relationships may be stigmatized, and the effects that this stigmatization may have on individuals both within and outside that relationship. Based on their work with committed fans of the music group The Grateful Dead, Rebecca Adams and Jane Rosen-Grandon illustrate the impact of this dedication on marital dynamics, with particular attention to the influence of this commitment on relationships where the other partner does not share this same interest.

In Section III we turn to two examples of counternormative relationships. In his review of the research literature on cross-gender friendships, Roger Baumgarte highlights the difficulties that these relationships pose, particularly in relation to sexual behavior. Andrew Yip examines changing attitudes toward same-sex romantic relationships, and the growing redefinition and acceptance of such relationships as committed partnerships.

Section IV has four chapters dealing with issues of power-discrepant relationships. Tanya Garrett reviews the arguments for and against sexual activity between therapist and patient, both during and after treatment. Questioning whether necrophilia should be categorized as a psychiatric disorder, Dany Nobus suggests its inappropriateness may reflect taboos concerning death as well as the lack of consensuality. Brian Spitzberg and William Cupach develop an outline for obsessional relational intrusion and stalking, and reflect on shifting attitudes toward intrusive relationship behaviors. Finally, in the last chapter of this section, Dennis Howitt considers why pedophilia should be the focus of growing approbation when attitudes regarding other sexual activities appear to be increasingly tolerant.

In the concluding section and chapter, Robin Goodwin and Duncan Cramer first return to the major dimensions identified by Steve Duck and Lise VanderVoort in the opening chapter to this book, in the light of the various contributions made in this volume. They supplement this analysis with the results of a survey undertaken among their own students into which relationships are considered “inappropriate.” They then consider a continuing and vexing question—Why do we find inappropriate relationships so hard to end—before considering some of the wider historical and cultural perspectives on their findings. Finally, they suggest some of the implications this might have for relational counseling, as well as for the development of the field of personal relationships as a discipline overall.

Several people deserve our warm appreciation for the work they did on this book. Linda Bathgate and her colleagues at LEA have been a consistent source of encouragement throughout this enterprise. In addition, we would like to thank the many friends and colleagues who have shared both their academic insights into relational inappropriateness and, just as insightfully, their own experiences of inappropriate relationships, which have greatly contributed to our thinking in this area. Given the nature of these insights we have, however, decided not to list these “silent contributors” here, for fear of legal suits and spousal retributions.

—Robin Goodwin

—Duncan Cramer

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I
CONCEPTUALIZING
INAPPROPRIATE
RELATIONSHIPS

Scarlet Letters and Whited Sepulchres: The Social Making of Relationships as “Inappropriate”

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University of Iowa

For or what reasons and on what grounds is a relationship to be judged “inappropriate”? The term relational “inappropriateness” obviously suggests a contrast between appropriateness and *in*appropriateness of personal relationships, and that relational behavior may be judged accordingly. Why is it customary to judge personal relationships, private behavior, or intimacy as “appropriate” or “inappropriate”? What is “appropriate” behavior, “appropriate” relational behavior, or an “appropriate” relationship? Who decides?

These initial questions suggest further issues that provide some topics for research: Is there a difference between behavior in a relationship and the relationship itself? That is, can inappropriate behaviors occur in an appropriate relationship or does the occurrence of those behaviors immediately render the relationship inappropriate? In short, in what ways is a relationship more than the sum of its component behaviors? Other topics include: What is the difference among a relationship, a behavior, and a relational behavior? Does the subjective meaning of the relationship to its partners, or of the relational behavior, make it appropriate or inappropriate in that relationship, or is it the fact of its emergence into the public domain that makes such a judgment suitable? What, if any, is the relationship between public, social codes and the punishment incurred for inappropriateness in what is otherwise a private dyadic arrangement? What marks the seriousness of a relational transgression? What contextual factors affect judgment? What are the social penalties for inappropriateness? What does it mean personally to participants to be in a relationship judged by others to be inappropriate?

We have only a small number of pages within which to consider this large array of questions and their implications, which intersect in complex ways that research will have to unpack for us. Our analysis, drawing heavily on Davis’

¹We are grateful to Julia T.Wood, Walter J.Carl, and the editors for their helpful insights and comments on previous drafts of this chapter.

(1983) interesting volume *SMUT: Erotic reality/obscene ideology*, assumes that any regulation of private behaviors in relationships is central to the maintenance of a broader social order, irrespective of the specific beliefs within any particular social order.²

Within a given social order, we must differentiate between inappropriateness judged by the partners and by an observer, considering that partners are unlikely to be in a relationship that they truly consider unjustifiably inappropriate themselves. In this chapter we identify three different levels of inappropriate relationship types, basing this classification on the one hand on a hierarchy of rules that are broken, and on the other hand on a logical ranking by way of levels of disapprobation (counternormative/unconventional relationships, disapproved relationships, and forbidden/inexcusable relationships). Some criteria that outsiders appear to use to make these identifications are judgments of *equity* within a relationship that render, for example, certain sorts of age and resource differentials unacceptable; *duty and obligation* to partners that render certain forms of extra-dyadic relationship inappropriate; and concerns over *instrumentality* that lead to disapproval of some sorts of relationship, especially between people of unequal power, such as boss and employee. Finally, we note that some relationships in Western society are discouraged but not regarded as truly inappropriate, such as enemyship (Wiseman & Duck, 1995), or marriages of convenience for money or reasons other than “love” (Collins & Coltrane, 1995; Kephart, 1967)—paradoxically, society tolerates these, while disapproving of sexual promiscuity, “swinging,” and prostitution.

All these considerations are driven by a discussion of the relevance of the point of view of the observer, especially as this relates to social forces that constrain and enforce norms of appropriateness, such as the practices of gossip and social accounting that promote strong control over the acceptability of relational forms (Bergmann, 1993). We note also the ways in which certain examples of tainted relationships have been differently classified across time, reflecting the social rather than the inherent nature of the relational transgression. Because our analysis taps into some key cultural beliefs/values about equity, power, duty, instrumentality, and the sanctity of written contracts, we also mention some cultural relativities about inappropriateness (although the bulk of our remarks inevitably betray our membership of “Western society” and, specifically, our knowledge of British and American attitudes and social codes in more ways than those so far acknowledged). Our goal is to provide readers with an analysis that may inform and enrich their readings of the specific

²For example, although most societies sanction marriage, only one form of system assumes free choice in marriage and relative freedom to leave that marriage under certain conditions. In other societies (as indeed in our own until surprisingly recently), marriages of convenience are much more common than most present Western theories would presume (Goodwin, 1998; Rothman, 1984).

inappropriate relationships discussed in the subsequent chapters of this book. We also hope that scrutiny of “inappropriateness” may shed light equally on the elements that constitute socially condoned “appropriate” relationships.

FROM SIN TO INAPPROPRIATENESS

“But this is fantastic,” he said. “I don’t know what I’ve been thinking about. First to tell you and then to ask you—this. One can’t spy on one’s wife through a friend—and that friend pretend to be her lover.” “Oh, it’s not done,” I said, “but neither is adultery or theft or running away from the enemy’s fire. The not done things are done every day, Henry. It’s part of modern life. I’ve done most of them myself.” (Greene, 1951, p.17)

People have always done bad things to, and with, other people. Likewise, people have always been liable to social criticism for doing so. Moral rules, condemning certain sorts of behavior and approving others, are some of the oldest writings discovered (Ginsburg, 1988), and many of these rules speak of specific relationships (usually between superiors and inferiors, parents and children, or husbands and wives). The criteria for moral judgment of such behaviors have not always been the same, however, and neither have the consequences of transgression, except that the overall effect of the judgments is to reinforce a larger social order through direction and regulation of personal relationships, particularly in respect of sexual behavior (Davis, 1983). For instance, the sexual behaviors that could have rendered a Victorian “ruined” or “disgraced” might today be taken only as a mark of the “freedom” and “progress” of modern sexual identities, thus reflecting and reinforcing a looser and less differentiated social order of sexual hierarchy (Giddens, 1979).

Any exploration of criteria through which relational behavior is commonly designated as wrong encounters two shifts: one from the historical emphasis on the importance of formal (often public) humiliation of the person committing wrong behavior, toward a more recent emphasis on rehabilitation; the second from basically religious grounds for judgment toward secular grounds of “civility” and mutual respect. We also note that the older terms to describe relational transgressions, such as “sinful,” once stood where the term “inappropriate” now denotes something deviating from propriety rather than bearing testament to the inherent corruption of the person. We parse the term “inappropriateness” as now connoting not inherent evil so much as misguidance, hence diminishing the impact of the judgment. For example, necrophilia, once regarded as a “Crime against Nature” (Davis, 1983), is now regarded as a

psychological disorder, not as evidence of satanic influence (DSM–IV 302.9 classifies necrophilia as a “Paraphilia not otherwise specified”).

Although the traditional religious bases still exist for accounts of [un]acceptability, and the current secular labels are often kissing cousins of the older religious ones, the present-day secular basis for judgment is importantly different in two respects. First, it rests not so much on the assumption that the actions of a person disclose the inherent badness of the person (e.g., as a “sinner” whose evil can be remedied through such things as physical pain, symbolizing the excision of the evil; King James, 1612), but instead focuses on the specific behaviors themselves and hence implies a greater extent to which they can be remedied in the future, rather than merely atoned for. Second, the traditional ethic rests on a presumption of the existence of naturally good moral laws whose transgression necessarily implicates the contrarily evil nature of the doer. Recent thought adopts a relativistic position based on the recognition of particular circumstances justifying or not justifying behavior on a particular occasion and taking account of consequences as well as intent. This blend of circumstances and inherent personality traits, rather than the latter alone, has the effect of diminishing the indication of a person’s essentially evil nature when considering personal responsibility for inappropriate behavior.

A further central issue in assessments of present-day relationships is disapproval of instrumentality that makes use of relative power of partners. Whereas previously it might have been accepted that the upper and employing classes could [ab]use power over the lower, working classes, today’s egalitarianism disapproves of that, just as it disapproves of parents’ use of physical punishment of children. It is therefore probably significant that the label “inappropriate” nowadays attaches predominantly, as other chapters in this book indicate, to instances of sexual activity. The focus on matters of sexual resources rather than other relational resources, such as aid and comfort, has a long record in the history of inappropriate relationships (at least as far back as Joseph and Potiphar’s wife; Genesis 39:7–20), but is nowadays of particular concern as issues of power and sexual harassment gain greater recognition by evoking a spectre of instrumentality versus genuine affection, where sex may be seen as “traded” in nonpeer relationships. Incidentally, it is worth noting that even though treason (see the U.S. Constitutional definition, based on giving aid and comfort to an enemy) is one relationship that is inappropriate and not always based on sex, sexually related metaphors are very often used to describe it (e.g., “sleeping with the enemy”), although we are grateful to Robin Goodwin for noting that sleeping with the enemy often is just that. The metaphor nonetheless implies that the physical is used to corrupt when higher moral goals should take precedence.

Finally, it is important to note that the label “inappropriate” reflects abstract and idealized social norms, not actual social practice. In reality, normative behavior is often the exception. For example, although a single marriage lasting

until the death of one of the partners may still be prescribed as the ideal “appropriate” adult heterosexual relationship in industrialized nations, there are relatively few such marriages (Kipnis, 1998). Similarly, although more than 50% of Americans will publicly condemn adultery, more than 50% of Americans (depending on the poll) also privately admit to having committed it more than once (Kipnis, 1998), and we have no reason to believe that Americans are exceptional in this respect. Kipnis, however, noted (p.293):

Sexual self-reporting is notoriously unreliable; the statistics on adultery are simply all over the place. Kinsey’s reports famously pegged male adultery at 50 percent in 1948 and female adultery at 26 percent in 1953. The numbers currently in common usage, based on a 1994 survey by the National Opinion Research Center, are quite low by comparison (21 percent for men, 11 percent for women), but suspicion has been cast on the method for arriving at these figures and the data collection method itself (the interviewers were predominantly white, middle-aged women, for example). One problem is that men seem to over-report and women seem to underreport sexual activity. In the raw numbers gathered for this survey, apparently 64 percent of male sexual contacts can’t be accounted for—or, rather, they could if, in a pool of 3,500 responses, 10 different women each had 2,000 partners they didn’t record.

INAPPROPRIATE RELATIONSHIPS OR INAPPROPRIATE RELATIONAL BEHAVIOR?

We begin our examination of these issues by exploring the ways in which former President Bill Clinton discussed his relationship with Monica Lewinsky and the terms of the debate that ensued.

Grand Jury Testimony, August 17, 1998

Clinton: When I was alone with Ms. Lewinsky on certain occasions in early 1996, and once in early 1997, I engaged in conduct that was wrong. These encounters did not consist of sexual intercourse. They did not constitute sexual relations, as I understood that term to be defined at my January 17th, 1998 deposition.... But they did involve inappropriate, intimate contact. These inappropriate encounters ended, at my insistence, in early 1997. I also had occasional telephone

conversations with Ms. Lewinsky that included inappropriate sexual banter... I regret that what began as a friendship came to include this contact. (http://www.courttv.com/casefiles/clintoncrisis/clinton_testimony/1.html retrieved on August 5, 2000)

In the impeachment and attempted removal of President Clinton from office, the defense, prosecution, and President himself struggled to define “sexual relations.” Yet the other key phrase popularized during the President’s troubles—“inappropriate relationship”—met with little definitional debate.

The term “inappropriate relationship” in fact appears not to have been used by President Clinton himself, who referred only to inappropriate conduct, contact, and behaviors. We wonder, therefore, if there is a difference between an inappropriate relationship and inappropriate relational behavior (cf. also Cramer, 2000). The question may seem moot in the case of Clinton and Lewinsky, because the prosecution was most enthusiastic about discovering details of the pair’s sexual contact regardless of whether or not their entire relationship was inappropriate. But Clinton himself implied that there is a crucial difference between a relationship and relational behavior when he regretted that “what began as a friendship came to include this conduct.” The presumably appropriate relationship of “friendship” was compromised by inappropriate “conduct.” [Whether or not a friendship between the President and a young, female White House intern is appropriate was not addressed in the trial.] This attempted distinction suggests at least that it is possible to distinguish between behaviors that are expected in a given type of relationship and those that are proscribed within a given relationship. It also suggests that some types of relationships are mutually incompatible, such as a friendship and a sexual relationship, even though married couples occasionally identify their spouse as their best friend. This paradox might be explained by the hypothesis that there is a social ordering of relationship behaviors and that “lower-order behaviors,” such as friendship, are permitted in “higher-order relationships,” such as marriage, but that the reverse is not true and renders the relationship *de facto* an inappropriate instance of its type.

Such common understandings of the boundaries of relationships lie at the root of dilemmas faced by, for example, nonromantic cross-sex friends (Werking, 1997, 2000; Baumgarte, chap.6, this volume). It is evident that any couple in a nonnormative relationship takes account of (and *needs* to take account of) the beliefs and assumptions of the audience to whom they are communicating the nature of their relationship (e.g., see Masuda, 2000 on the ways in which former romantic partners, now friends, solve the dilemmas of presenting their relationship to different sorts of audiences). The underlying assumption is that the private form of the relationship can remain appropriate

even when some of its conduct is not expected within the relational form recognized by the public. That assumption, however, depends on the couple being able to either keep the dynamics of their relationship out of the public domain or else construct a publicly acceptable account of those dynamics.

On the other hand, some inappropriate behaviors are frequently encountered within otherwise appropriate relationships. Spousal abuse and cruelty are examples of inappropriate behavior occurring in an appropriate relationship. Dishonesty, betrayal, public sex acts, and public arguments are other behaviors that are socially condemned yet can occur in socially acceptable relationships. In some cases, single inappropriate behaviors may jeopardize the appropriateness of an entire relationship. A bulletin from the U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons (1999) identifies such slippery slopes:

A staff member allegedly used facility weight equipment along with residents. While some staff might see this as innocuous, this establishes an unprofessional relationship with residents and must be avoided.... A staff member allegedly accepted free meals from a resident who worked at a fast food establishment and brought food back to the facility. This establishes an atmosphere in which small favors are exchanged; which easily leads to bribery and/or extortion.... A staff member allegedly purchased an automobile from a resident. This is clearly inappropriate and gives at least the appearance of bribery, even if the staff member paid full value for the automobile. (U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons, 1999)

These behaviors, although appropriate for friendship, are seen to compromise the staff-resident relationship in a prison.

We appear, then, to be dealing with an implicit taxonomy of relationships and also with a separate implicit hierarchy of relational *behaviors* that are regarded as crossing Rubicons between one form of relationship and a different form. Once the boundary is crossed, the nature of the relationship is changed by these bridging behaviors, and only with great difficulty can the relationship be restored to its previous form. In the earlier example, gift giving is a bridge from properly formal to improperly informal; in the case of nonromantic relationships, sexual conduct is, according to circumstances, a bridge from a "friendship" to either an "inappropriate" sexual relationship or an "appropriate" romantic relationship. Thus, "inappropriate sexual relationship" is implicitly defined in terms of behavior (sex), whereas "appropriate romantic relationship" implies a broader set of legitimate feelings, thoughts, and behaviors.

Interestingly, the converse does not hold. Socially acceptable behavior occurring in a socially inappropriate relationship does not make that relationship appropriate. Examples abound:

- A gay couple seen holding hands does not find that this behavior—appropriate for heterosexual lovers—makes their relationship more acceptable to people who condemn homosexuality (Huston & Schwartz, 1995).
- Deeply committed heterosexual relations between a Catholic priest and a parishioner are condemned however deep, genuine, and long-lasting the love may be.
- Strong, devoted, committed, and exclusive love of a man toward one of his sheep does not make the relationship legally acceptable.

On the contrary, public awareness of such feelings and behaviors brings condemnation, not commendation, and puts people at greater risk for hate crimes and other lesser forms of social disapproval (Mazanec, 2001). Also, whereas “affection” is expected of a man toward his young daughter, “affection” between a pedophile and the same child is interpreted differently and is immediately suspect. The inappropriateness of a relationship is not established by mere absence or breakdown of behaviors paradigmatically expected in that relationship. Loss of respect, waning of love, or decrease in equity of contribution to the relationship do not, in and of themselves, suffice to render inappropriate the relationship that might have been founded on their growth (Duck, 1998). Thus, the behavior itself is not the sole criterion for appropriateness but is interpreted relative to expectations associated with the assumed relational form and other contextual cues provided by the person’s role (father, priest, etc.).

Deferring, for the moment, discussion of the importance of these latter contextual cues, the previous discussion challenges us to differentiate between “a relationship” and “relational behavior” and to note that there are types of behavior that society regards as transitional markers between one form of relationship and another (Conville, 1988). This differentiation is no easy task for researchers, because many scholarly attempts at presentation of Paradigmatic Case Formulations and rules of relationships (e.g., Davis & Todd, 1985; Ginsburg, 1988) have focused extensively on *behaviors* as the relevant criteria for differentiating relationship types from each other without positing the notion of *transitional behaviors* (except in terms of quantity—increase of something, such as intimacy, being typically assumed almost exclusively to be the measure of change; Conville, 1988). Yet, in some relationships, an *observer’s presumption* of a transition, where there is none according to the relational partners, poses problems for those partners (as shown by Werking, 1997, in her work on nonromantic cross-sex friendships). Werking (2000) noted both the difficulty and the significance of the ways in which partners in cross-sex friendships present their relationship to external audiences such as family and friends. She wrote that “ [the] narratives told by research participants about cross-sex friendship are constructed within specific historical cultural and social

configurations" (Werking, 2000, p.130). Werking observed a distinction between public reports of relationships and the private conduct of relationships. This distinction rests partly on the difference between the "outsider view" of a relationship (the way in which it is presented to outsiders) and the "insider view" (the way in which people actually conduct their relationships in private between themselves).

Evidently, one reason for secrecy in a relationship is that insiders recognize the rhetorical problems of reporting about a relationship to certain public audiences (Masuda, 2000). Equally, presentation of a relationship in public can disturb the partners' needs for privacy. For example, there is evidence that, as part of the establishment of very close relationships, partners construct "personal idioms" (e.g., nicknames and pet terms for each other, other people, or behaviors) in order to talk about their experience in a way that is obscure to other people (Hopper, Knapp, & Scott, 1981). Given that the nature of the relationship is already established as close and personal, a main purpose of using such terms is to draw boundaries around the relationship and render it exclusive of other people, thus adding to its sense of private specialty. It is also possible for partners to carry out behaviors that please them personally while recognizing that other people might condemn them—or at the very least there could be problematic rhetorical dilemmas in presenting the relationship to other people without violating its essence as understood by the two partners (e.g., by revelation of partners' private sexual practices).

The acceptability of a relationship's definition to an insider or outsider will depend in part on the purpose for which it is intended to be defined, whether in research or everyday life, and whether by the partners themselves or for the benefit of outsiders (VanderVoort & Duck, 2000). Although there have been many attempts by researchers to define "a relationship" (e.g., Kelley, et al., 1983), all have met with criticism and none is universally accepted. Numerous authors (Acitelli, Duck, & West, 2000; Duck, 1990, 1994; Kelley, 1984; VanderVoort & Duck, 2000) have suggested that the issue of defining the nature of any kind of a close personal relationship is a remaining central problem for the field. Personal codes and private relational behaviors are well-established features of the development and conduct of relationships. Given the central problem of the insider and outsider perspectives on relationships (see Duck, 1990; Surra & Ridley, 1991), the definition of any "relationship" will be problematic, if unobservable private behaviors have a central role in personal relationships yet are never made public for fear of consequences—as in the case of relationships that partners suspect would be seen as inappropriate by others.

A fortiori it is going to be tough to define an "inappropriate relationship," especially because the previous quotations from Bill Clinton and others appear to differentiate behavior from relationship, or else make the assumption that behavior is not itself a relationship but only an indicator or measure of one for specific purposes and at particular times. Yet, as Spitzberg and Cupach

(chap.10, this volume) pointed out, particular behaviors make a relationship only when they are accepted and performed in a mutually acceptable way. If mutuality is the criterion, then Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky *did* have a relationship, not just a set of behavioral exchanges. All the same, prostitutes/gigolos and clients carrying out the same sexual behaviors in similar secret and hurried circumstances do not have a relationship in the sense in which “personal relationship” is normally understood in the research literature. Hence, what elements are critical in differentiating relationships from strings of behavior, and how do these help us understand inappropriate relationships?

One element that distinguishes a relationship from a behavior is concatenated extension over time (Hinde, 1981). Relationships are neither zero history nor zero future; instead, they are strings of instances of behaviors. Another element is a mental element: The relevant people both believe that they have a relationship (Duck, 1980). It is not reasonable to suppose that two people have a relationship just because one of them thinks that they do (see Spitzberg & Cupach, chap.10, this volume) or because other people think they do. A third element of a relationship is that the majority of behaviors carried out within it have similar meaning to both partners and are relational acts. That is, their very performance with the other person under the presumption of shared meaning is the relationship (Duck, 1994). However, these three elements are not transparent to outsiders and may not even be apparent to them. The judgments made by outsiders are thus typically those that take least account of the internal and private dynamics of a relationship, and are also the reference point for the appropriateness of behavior. Thus, as far as judgments of appropriateness are concerned, the relationship is more than the sum of its component behaviors, but, as far as judgments of inappropriateness go, single sorts of behavior (mostly sexual ones) immediately transform a relationship from one sort to another in the minds of the public and partners alike. Such single inappropriate behaviors can apparently render a relationship publicly inappropriate even when they do not do so privately.

In short, the definition of appropriate and inappropriate relationships and behavior is insufficiently established by looking wholly inward to the relational partners (although that in itself is not unhelpful) and at their conjoint actions together. The definition depends on two things: first, the outsiders’ views that define what is typically condemned in a given society and rely on the shame caused by public awareness of otherwise private behavior; and second, insiders’ internalization of those views by reason of their membership of society. For reasons of such discouragement through public shaming, the police in Manchester, UK, recently began to publish in the newspaper the names and addresses of men caught “kerb-crawling” and soliciting prostitution in an area that the police were attempting to clean up (*The Times*, August, 2000). As Bergmann (1993) argued, gossip (or, much more significantly, the fear of becoming a notorious object of gossip) acts to order any society by laying out

and informally enforcing guidelines for propriety. It is through networks and their tools of social communication that individuals and dyads are closely touched by an otherwise abstract "society" (Milardo & Duck, 2000). Such networks act as enforcers of society's norms and preferences, although these are buttressed by the media, pronouncements of religious and moral leaders, and the political and judicial systems.

Given this background, a taxonomy of appropriateness and inappropriateness depends in large part on the degree of stigma attached to the behavior when/if it becomes public, and also on the degrees of formal punishment exacted for such transgression. Public definition of appropriate behavior and inappropriate behavior is ratified by laws, the media, cultural traditions and stories, and an impressive list of "common sense" ideas about relationships (Fitch, 1998). Folk tales, for example, tell of the rewards for loyalty, drudgery, and submission in the Cinderella story, where Cinderella's reward (a handsome prince) follows from her uncomplaining faithfulness to her role as a household servant (not exactly the American dream!). In a search through written literature and folk stories dating back 1,000 years, Contarello and Volpato (1991) identified the same references to defining behaviors of true friendship, such as loyalty, trust, seeking the other's benefit even at the expense of one's own, and so on. Since Cicero's *De Amicitia*, these same consistent themes are clearly ratified as elements of acceptable friendships and are still borne out by scientific studies looking for core, shared, public concepts of friendship in a given society (Davis & Todd, 1985). Also, researchers as far back as Simmel (1950 ed.) have noted that relational partners refer their internal relational dynamics to social norms as well as to their own private evaluations in order to judge relational satisfaction (Duck, 1998). Thus, it would be hardly surprising if these same broad cultural and social norms were not also implicit guides to couples' private expectations about their own relational behavior and form.

For one thing, in sexual and marital relationships there appear to be a number of expectations about appropriateness of partners for one another as judged from public and cultural materials. For example, it is expected that marriage is normative between the ages of about 22 and 28 (Cunningham & Antill, 1995); that partners are both likely to be about the same age (Norton & Moorman, 1987) and very likely from the same social, demographic, religious, and ethnic groups (Kerckhoff, 1974); and that partners are, of course, required to meet social criteria for mental fitness to conduct the enterprise. Reproductive issues frame many social norms concerning sexual relationships. For example, the inappropriateness (as society sees it) of age difference is often articulated as "old enough to be her father" types of statements that invoke the incest taboo. Significant age differences between partners also attract public interest and commentary, especially if the woman in a marriage is markedly older than the man (perhaps because a large age difference is "worse" when the older person is a woman, because she may no longer be able to bear children; Kenrick & Trost,