Honest but Hurtful Messages in Romantic Relationships

By

Noah Franken

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Advised by

Rhonda Sprague, Ph.D.
Timothy Halkowski, Ph.D.
Liz Fakazis, Ph.D.

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Division of Communication
University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point
Stevens Point, Wisconsin
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Abstract

In romantic relationships partners expect an exchange of honest and emotionally supportive communication. Delivering an honest but hurtful message to a romantic partner poses a confounding dilemma where emotional support must be compromised in order for honesty to be shared. Past research (Zhang & Stafford, 2008) has uncovered this relational contradiction and examined it using Face Management Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Cupach & Metts, 1994; Goffman, 1967). This study aims to understand HBH messages in romantic relationships through examining surrounding dialectic contradictions along with strategies of politeness and deference used in message delivery. Controlled openness, patience, friendliness, and clarity were all factors associated with satisfactory message experiences.
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People involved in romantic relationships expect certain communicative behaviors from their partners. Honest communication is normally one expectation. Emotionally supportive communication is another. Generally, it is assumed that both of these will be honored (Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994). However, sometimes simultaneous regard seems impossible. Upholding one expectation breaches the other, as in the case of a wife who tells her husband that his eyesight is getting too poor for him to drive. It is honest yet it identifies a flaw which may be more hurtful than emotionally supportive. This can be hard to do, although it is done with the best of intentions. This phenomenon is called an honest but hurtful message (HBH) (Zhang & Stafford, 2008), and any relationship that endures long enough faces occasions for HBH messages.

Zhang and Stafford (2008) documented face ramifications of HBH messages in romantic relationships. It was found that HBH messages can decrease assessments of relational satisfaction and closeness between partners. The purpose of this study is to understand the experience of giving an HBH message to a romantic partner and to describe the ways in which face-threat is minimized. HBH messages are worth an academic look because they inform us on communication competence, because to give a satisfactory HBH message an awareness of contradiction must occur, and then, the degree of contradiction must be matched with an equivalent set of communication strategies. How these strategies are put into practice is the subject of this study.

Dialectics (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) is chosen as a theoretical framework because of its niche for addressing situations of relational contradiction. A dialectic is a contradiction of terms paired with each other, like openness-closedness. Openness-closedness can be observed in a relationship by how a communicator shapes the discourse of a topic. It is possible to control
the reality of an event by how freely information about it is divulged or concealed. The hurt of a message can be blunt or softened, and because a balance between opposites is always struck, one pole is emphasized over the other in varying strengths. The hurtful topic can be completely open, a little bit open, slightly closed, etc. Therefore, the examination of openness-closedness in an HBH message can show how a speaker manages the discourse of a topic, and it can be said that the way the discourse of a dialectic is managed helps determine the balance of honesty and hurt in the message, which, in turn, helps determine the amount of face-threat in a message.

In conjunction with dialectics, Brown and Levinson's (1987) work on Politeness Theory and Goffman's (1956) study of deference are also pertinent to HBH messages in romantic relationships. These concepts provide strategies and practices that can explain ways in which communicators manage dialectics. In other words, Brown and Levinson (1987) and Goffman (1956) have categorized different approaches used in face-threatening situations. These strategies and schemes can be identified and understood in terms of how they sway a dialectic in an HBH message. For example, the hurt of a message can be mollified by a comforting touch that communicates complete and open support. Perhaps, then, the honesty of the message can be spoken more openly because a strategy was used to simultaneously communicate support. Interplays such as this tell the story of HBH messaging between romantic partners. Understanding these scenarios may help alleviate the strain put on relationships due to the potential face threat of HBH messages (Zhang & Stafford, 2008).
Review of Literature

The development and maintenance of a relationship requires the management of contradiction; this is the basis of dialectics (Baxter, 1988; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Graham, 2003, Montgomery & Baxter, 1998). The type of relationship does not matter. Organizational and interpersonal relationships can both be viewed through a dialectic lens. It is even more accurate to say that it is always a system of relationships under investigation in any dialectic study. Relationships do not stand alone and cannot be isolated. The same can be said about HBH messages. Both exist within a complex machine that has many moving parts. As a foundation, dialectics embraces the complex and contradictory nature of HBH messaging in romantic relationships.

The review begins with a general discussion of dialectics and works toward specific applications of dialects with implications of how dialectics can be applied to HBH messages in romantic relationships. HBH messages are then discussed in full. The term, HBH message, comes from Zhang and Stafford (2008), who studied such messages in romantic relationships. Zhang and Stafford (2008) assess potential damages done to relationships as a consequence of HBH messages. Their work is grounded by the work of other scholars who have studied actions that are hurtful and inherently face threatening. Vangelisti (1994) focuses on the types of messages that induce hurt and explains why those messages do so. Brown and Levinson (1987) focus on a similar idea called Face Threatening Acts (FTAs). Brown and Levinson (1987) outline ways to accomplish FTAs through politeness, which go hand-in-hand with rituals of deference discussed by Goffman (1956). This work collectively provides a backdrop for the study of dialectics and HBH messages in romantic relationships.
Dialectics

The basic tenets of dialectics are described by Dindia (1994). Opposing forces in a relationship perpetuate constant change. The tension is always shifting and is never resolved. Because of this, the relationship continually evolves. The relationship is defined and redefined through its characteristics in the context of a greater society. Baxter and Montgomery (1996) give more support to this idea. They draw on a collective body of scholarship to propose four principles that are constant in all dialectic research. These are contradiction, change, praxis, and totality. Contradiction – the friction of harmony and discord – is the driving force. It is characterized by the continuous push and pull of opposite poles. For example, autonomy-connection, openness-closedness, and predictability-novelty are the three primary contradictions in relationships (Baxter & Montgomery, 1993). Dialectics pose conflicting actions and tensions that cannot be worked out, which leads to regular change, and as a relationship is in motion, each partner acts on change and then reacts to their own actions. These reactions are referred to as praxis. The totality of the process is an interconnected and interdependent system. Dialectics is concerned with the workings of this system. To understand the dialectics as a whole, it is necessary to understand the four principles, contradiction, change, praxis, and totality.

Contradiction. The term contradiction is used without any particular connotation. It is objective and is neither negative nor positive. It is understood as a fundamental struggle between two relational interests that are opposite, but this does not mean to imply that dialectic contradiction is synonymous with conflict. It is possible for conflict to arise. Werner and Baxter (1994) explain that contradiction can lead to confrontation, and also to intrapersonal distress, but contradiction can also be positive. More to the point, though, contradiction is not its consequence; it is merely the gap between a term and its complete counterpart. The primary
contradictions, autonomy-connection, openness-closedness, and predictability-novelty are examples (Baxter & Montgomery, 1993). Others exist too, like intimacy-detachment and honesty-deceit. In contradiction, one term of the pair is the reciprocal of the other: to be honest is to not deceive, to deceive is to be dishonest, and to be both is impossible.

According to Rawlins (1989), one pole of a dialectic usually gets stressed. For example, a person may neglect to share certain information with their partner like the news of an expensive purchase, or a setback at work. By not mentioning certain topics they emphasize closedness over openness. If a person lies about a topic deceit is emphasized over honesty. If a partner does something spontaneous novelty is emphasized. Each action impacts future actions.

Every day, dialectic decisions shape the trajectory of a relationship. Some couples develop relationships where open communication is fostered. Some couples are very connected. Other couples discover that a certain degree of autonomy is required for civility. The way a couple balances contradiction dictates the relationship's evolution. Contradiction makes the next principle of dialectics, change, possible.

Change. Change is the second principle of dialectics discussed by Baxter and Montgomery (1996). Change is a byproduct of contradiction. Change occurs in a relationship because the opposing poles of a dialectic are always at odds (Baxter & Simon, 1993). This means that the sensibility of a relationship is different each time the partners meet. Each time is under new conditions with a different set of rules so the relationship is always unstable. The presence of change in relationships is widely accepted among dialectical scholars (Bridge and Baxter, 1992; Poole & Van de Ven, 2004; & Baxter & Montgomery, 1997). The essence of it, on the other hand, is under debate, and this is fitting because change is an elusive principle. Taken as a whole, the various perspectives capture the dynamic nature of change.
Change is described as goal-driven and predictable by Bridge and Baxter (1992), unpredictable and erratic by Poole and Van de Ven (2004), and self-adapting and transcending by Baxter and Montgomery (1997). Bridge and Baxter (1992) suggest actors in a relationship make change happen. They aver predictable change can be achieved when one pole of a dialectic dominates the other. For example, a choice can be made between partners to emphasize closedness about a past relational dispute as a way to forgive and forget. They can also do the opposite and be open about the matter to actively work things out. In both cases dialectics are managed to bring about change. Poole and Van de Ven (2004) suggest change is more chaotic, that it cannot be achieved with any kind of precision. The dynamic of a relationship can change without warning, and there is no way to reliably predict how a relationship will evolve. For example, the goal of openness about a past dispute may intend to repair the relationship, but the result may be the discovery of cogent reasons to end the relationship. The couple may decide, through open discussion, they do not belong together. Dominance of dialectic control, therefore, is fragile and ephemeral.

This concept is similar to Baxter and Montgomery’s (1997) suggestion that relationships continually define and redefine themselves. Every situation in a relationship is new because it is marked by a progression of what came before it. Even hackneyed routines follow an arc of constant change because every day they are done they are done a day later. Every experience transforms the relationship. Control is illusory. Partners can only manage change by noticing it and adapting to it. For example, if a couple agrees the relationship is getting stale, they may emphasize novelty over predictability and do something spontaneous. This perhaps could even be the result of an HBH message, where one partner senses the relationship getting bland and tells the other that change is desired. This can be hurtful because it criticizes the relationship.
The message, however, is an agent of change that brings awareness to something undesirable to make the situation better. Satisfaction is not guaranteed, but change is.

**Praxis.** The impact of change is praxis, the third principle of dialectics (Baxter and Montgomery, 1996). Praxis is summed up by the phrase, "What goes around comes around." Praxis means people are defined by their actions, and actions become the landscape for future actions. In Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) words, actors become "objects of their own actions" (p. 14). Like tumbleweed in the breeze, a relationship picks up artifacts along the way which guide its trajectory forward. These artifacts are significant events that give meaning to the relationship. For example, a partner who is habitually dishonest will almost always be perceived as guilty when facing suspicion, rarely getting the benefit of a doubt. It may also true, though, that a mendacious partner has many experiences refuting guilt, and knows which tactics have the best chance of doing so. In this way, the past provides the playing-ground for the present.

Baxter and Montgomery (1996) suggest even that praxis incorporates experiences beyond the bounds of the relationship, drawing from past relationships and pop culture. For example, a partner whose ex was dishonest may excessively scrutinize a new partner, and a partner who watches a television program about unfaithful spouses may start to get ideas. Praxis is perpetually redefining relationships.

HBH messages are one move in a series of events, and because of praxis, they help characterize relationships. For example, an unfaithful partner may confess their transgressions as a way to announce a change and make a distinction between old habits and new promises. This is an effort to redefine relational expectations, and a way to request a second chance. In the message, openness may be emphasized about certain events to detach from them, while closedness may be emphasized about especially damning events to conceal them. The way the
dialectic balances reflects praxis. It is an act of praxis, too, because it shapes the identity of a relationship.

**Totality.** The fourth and final principle of dialectics is totality (Baxter and Montgomery, 1996). Totality means dialectics should be viewed on a multi-dimensional plane. Baxter and Montgomery (1996) write that phenomena are only understood through how they relate to other phenomena. Everything must be understood by how it connects to other things. For example, an HBH message event is the combination of actors and actions in a given context. Every detail about the situation is important: the couple's identity, their relationship status, their finances, etc. The events that preceded the message and the reactions that followed are important too. Totality is the comprehensive picture of contradiction, change, and praxis.

In this study, the relevance of dialectic contradiction in HBH messaging between romantic partners is examined. Contradiction, as Baxter (1988) suggests, drives the study, making the three primary contradictions, autonomy-connection, openness-closedness, and predictability-novelty (Baxter & Montgomery, 1993), the starting points. Autonomy-connection is the conflict of separateness and togetherness. Two partners in a relationship are always somewhere between independence and interdependence which carries implications for how much they rely on each other for emotional support and honest communication. A couple who is more interdependent might put greater importance on these behaviors. This can make an HBH message particularly hurtful, especially if it one where a partner expresses desire to separate. Openness-closedness, as explained before, is a way in which discourse is controlled. Openness means information about a topic is disclosed while closedness means information is withheld. Openness-closedness accounts for the information in an HBH message, what is revealed or what is left out. If the the hurt of an HBH message is not emphasized, it is mentioned briefly and
diplomatically, it is softened through closedness. Emphasizing openness about honesty and support can add sincerity. Lastly, predictability-novelty is the conflict of what is expected and caprice. Predictability-novelty puts relationships in the context of a timeline. A relationship constantly changes in guided yet unpredictable ways. Some partners strive to make their future as predictable as possible. Others thrive on whim. An example was used earlier of an HBH message where one partner feels the relationship growing dull and expresses a need for more novelty. Another example could be of a partner feeling a relationship getting too erratic and expresses a need for predictability.

As with any HBH message, positive reactions are not guaranteed. The message may fail to produce positive change. It may strike a nerve and lead to a fight. Consider Baxter and Wilmot's (1985) discussion of taboo topics as an example. Taboo topics often exist within romantic relationships. These topics are off limits because they are likely to lead to conflict. The boundaries of these taboo topics, though, change as a relationship progresses, blurring the lines of communication (Montgomery & Baxter, 1998). A partner that is aware of these boundaries stands a better chance of shaping an effective message while keeping face damage to a minimum.

Applications of Dialectics

A core understanding of the main ideas of dialectics has been established. It now makes sense to look at dialectics in past research. Above all, dialectics is considered a relational concept. Relational dialectics is the broad category that includes interactional and contextual dialectics. In the following section, each is described and exemplified by specific studies. The examples focus on interpersonal applications of dialectics because that usage is more appropriate
to HBH messages in romantic relationships. Though, there are many studies that apply dialectics to organizational phenomena as well.

**Relational dialectics.** Relational dialectics is concerned with contradiction that is experienced in relationships (Baxter, 1988). Relational dialectics begins by the identifying contradiction. Baxter (1990) identified contradiction in romantic relationships between college undergraduates and found conflict between independence and autonomy, and predictability and spontaneity. This early work led to the identification of the three primary contradictions of interpersonal relationships (autonomy-connection, openness-closedness, and predictability-novelty) (Baxter and Simon, 1993). Baxter and Simon (1993) also discovered that romantic partners employ tactics to manage contradiction.

The study of tactics used to manage contradiction has been advanced by Montgomery (1993) and Johnson, et al. (2003). Montgomery (1993) suggests tactics should be adapting and form fitting. They are not hard and fast rules, but are guidelines that acclimatize to the evolution of the relationship. For example, the dynamic of a relationship changes with time; a courtship that began playfully might change into a loving and stable partnership over time. If so, communication patterns change with the shifting dynamic. The use of a flirtatious tactic to ask a favor may have been suitable in the courtship while an honest and straightforward approach may be more effective in an established relationship. Montgomery (1993) introduces the contradiction maintenance-flux as a way to study the changing patterns in a relationship. Johnson, et al. (2003) did further examination on relational flux. Looking at friendships, they discovered that relationships go through cyclical processes of development and deterioration. A friendship in the development stage may emphasize openness so the actors can get to know each
other. In the deterioration phase, the friends may emphasize closedness to give each other space. Awareness and management of these patterns helps maintain healthy relationships.

Spitzberg (1993) introduces communication competence into relational dialectics. The application of dialectics to competence is natural. Communication competence is exercised when an actor takes a goal directed course of action that is based on sound understanding of the likely consequences of the situation. A competent use of dialectics weighs opposing forces of a dilemma to balance the available options. A competent HBH message may be open about honesty and hurt, but just enough to not over-emphasize topics that are sensitive. Support, instead, may be over-emphasized. For example, a person who tells their partner that the relationship needs to be spiced up may choose to emphasize the fun activities that could be enjoyed instead of complaining about how boring things have gotten. On the contrary, the honesty and hurt of a message may be stressed to add gravity. Take an HBH message about a partner's drinking problem for example. Emphasizing the seriousness of possible consequences may induce the most hurt, but produce positive change nonetheless. Communication competence means to use the variables of the situation to their best advantage.

The applications shown thus far demonstrate the breadth of relational dialectics as a theoretical framework. They also show how dialectics can be useful to HBH messages. Contextual and interactional dialectics are more specialized applications of relational dialectics. Contextual dialectics examines contradiction between culture and relationships. Interactional dialectics examines contradiction in major transitions in relationships. These applications further illustrate the usefulness of dialectics to HBH messages, and show examples of studies that have looked at contradiction in romantic relationships, specifically (Masheter & Harris, 1986; Conville, 1988).
Contextual dialectics. Contextual dialectics are conceptualized by Rawlins (1989) as a clash between the public face of a relationship and its private realities. The public face of a relationship is shaped by cultural artifacts. For example, a relationship can be described by its activity in the community through terms like poker buddies, golf buddies, or work friends. These terms publicly define the type and function of the relationship. Terms like boyfriend and girlfriend, fiancé, and spouse also do this. They ascribe cultural meaning to the relationship. Dialectics is relevant when the public face of a relationship is quite different, or in fact at odds with, the private actualization of the relationship. Rawlins (1989) studied this concept via friendships at the workplace where job demands sometimes conflict with the idea of friendship. Workers have to negotiate between friendship role and coworker role. Braithwaite and Baxter (2006) studied dialectic contradiction in step-family relationships. They focused on communication patterns between children and their nonresidential parents where the challenge is to be a child or a parent from a separate residence. An example of an HBH message that demonstrates contextual dialectics may be one that expresses disfavor with the clash of public and private identities. A partner, uncomfortable with displays of affection, may express a desire to emphasize autonomy in public, which can be hurtful. The result may lead to confusion about the status of the relationship.

Interactional dialectics. Interactional dialectics are also conceptualized by Rawlins (1992). Interactional dialectics explains contradiction in relationships that results from the passing of time. Interactional dialectics are relevant to relationships moving through a transitional phase or undergoing a significant change. Kramer (2004) studied contradiction that occurred in a theatre troupe from the preproduction of a play to the performance. Tensions arose when players had to balance the demands of a fast-moving preparation schedule with their
personal lives. Masheter and Harris (1986) and Conville (1988) studied contradiction in romantic relationships transformed by divorce. Masheter and Harris (1986) studied couples who married, divorced, and then remained friends. This study found the dialectics stability-change and intimacy-detachment was to be helpful in describing the transition from marriage through divorce to friendship. Conville's (1988) study examined married couples on the verge of divorce. It shows examples of couples whose progress through changes of affection and intimacy. Through awareness of the change, it was possible for some couples to redefine their relationship in a positive way.

Interactional dialectics can apply to HBH messages in many ways. HBH messages may be statements about undesired change in relationships, in response to unfavorable transitions or new cycles. They may be attempts to bring change to relationships, to make relationships closer, or to end them completely. They may be countless everyday occurrences, everyday tensions built into storylines, expressed as an amalgamation of past events and future hopes. Or they may be out of the blue, blindsiding, and monumental. A few examples include a partner expressing a need for more novelty or more predictability, a partner confessing a transgression, or a partner asking for a separation, a breakup, or a divorce.

Baxter and Montgomery (1996) describe relationships as knots of contradiction. HBH messages in romantic relationships, where hurt can be brought to someone close, can easily become a tangled mess. It is interesting to note in Masheter and Harris’ (1986) study that two contradictions beyond the primary three became relevant. In addition to autonomy-connection, openness-closedness, and predictability-novelty, stability-change and intimacy-detachment were important dialectics for couples to manage when transitioning through divorce. In this same way, the study of HBH messages may yield contradictions like stability-change, intimacy-
detachment, or even previously undiscovered contradictions. It makes sense to use dialectics to find out which contradictions are relevant, and how they can be used to manage relational contradiction.

In the following section, HBH messages are given a comprehensive look. Zhang and Stafford (2008) are the primary contributors this concept. Their work stems from past research on hurtful messages (Vangelisti, 1994), and face-threatening acts (FTAs) (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This section covers the types and topics of messages that research has shown to be hurtful or face-threatening, and also explains why certain messages induce hurt. This section also sets up a discussion of FTAs and strategies for doing FTAs (Brown & Levinson, 1987), including practices of politeness and deference (Goffman, 1956) that can be used to reduce face damage.

Honest but Hurtful Messages

Zhang and Stafford (2008) bring attention to HBH messages in romantic relationships, noting the unique contradiction that these messages create. In romantic relationships, complete honesty is commonly expected and so is emotional support (Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994). Of course, there are exceptions. Vangelisti (1994) explains the example of a wife who is habitually abused by her husband, and who after a while, comes to expect negative treatment. This relationship, however, cannot be considered normal or healthy. Most people do expect supportive behavior from their romantic partners, and a message that is hurtful is hard-pressed to be supportive. The HBH message can be well-intentioned, aiming to change the relationship in a good way, like a message pointing out a lull in a relationship and asking for more excitement, but because it is hurtful it risks causing problems. In their application of Face Management Theory (Goffman, 1967; Brown & Levinson, 1987; and Cupach & Metts, 1994), to HBH
messages in romantic relationships, Zhang and Stafford (2008) found these messages to be face-threatening with the potential to reduce relational satisfaction. Further, evaluative messages (messages about the "state of the relationship") were found to be more face-threatening than messages about "personality, physical appearance, or behaviors," and the higher the degree of perceived face-threat, the more hurtful and damaging the message is to the relationship (Zhang & Stafford, 2008; p. 1).

**Hurtful messages.** Hurtful messages have been studied extensively in past research (Vangelisti, 1994; Vangelisi & Crumley, 1998, Vangelisti & Young, 2000). Much of this work is based on the concept of emotion, which can be triggered by social action (Bowers, Metts, & Duncan, 1985; Weiner, 1986), and suggests that interpersonal events can induce reactions like joy and pain. In fact, communication events can deeply affect mood and sentiment (Vangelisti, 1994). Mandler (1975) suggests that disruptions of normal patterns of communication contribute to emotional reactions. When a pattern is interrupted, a positive or negative attribution is assigned to the event. A positive attribution leads to a positive emotion like excitement. A negative attribution leads to a negative emotion like hurt. While work has been done to distinguish between the characteristics of negative emotions like anger (Buss, 1989), embarrassment (Metts & Cupach, 1989), and guilt (Vangelisti, Daly, & Rudnick, 1991), messages that invoke hurt are the primary concern for HBH messages. The hurt in an HBH message increases the potential for face damage which decreases relational satisfaction (Zhang & Stafford, 2008).

Vangelisti (1994) studied the interpersonal events that cause individuals to feel hurt. To do this, she asked participants to write about a situation when someone said something hurtful to them. The participants reproduced a "script" of the incident and indicated how hurtful the event
was. From this, Vangelisti (1994) created a typology of hurtful message speech acts, and described the social topics that most often induce them. Ten speech acts in total were identified along with nine social topics (available in full in Appendix A, tables 1.1 and 1.2). The speech acts deemed by participants to be the most hurtful were disclosures of information, evaluations, and accusations. The social topic that was included in most hurtful statements was romantic relations. Vangelisti’s (1994) results show why Zhang and Stafford (2008) found evaluative HBH messages to be most face-threatening in romantic relationships. Disclosures of information and evaluations are suggested to be, "most typically seen as highly hurtful," because they leave little room for retort (Vangelisti, 1994; p. 64). While a person can rebut an accusation, it is hard to balance a response to an informative statement like, "I have been cheating on you," or an evaluative statement like, "Our relationship has lost its spark." These types of messages are the most likely type to elicit hurt and are, therefore, the most threatening to relationships (Zhang & Stafford, 2008).

**Face-threatening acts.** A discussion akin to hurtful messages is that of face-threatening acts (FTAs). HBH messages in romantic relationships are a type of FTA (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Brown and Levinson (1987) write extensively about FTAs, drawing from Goffman’s (1967) conceptualization of face, which is the reputation and vulnerability of a participant in a social action. FTAs, can jeopardize the reputation of those in the action. Examples of FTAs are warnings, expressions of anger, statements of disapproval, criticisms, disagreements, and challenges (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The list identifies many more including acts of kindness that are face humbling, gratifications that are humiliating, and profanations that are embarrassing.

Brown and Levinson (1987) point out, "any rational agent," (p. 68) tries to avoid FTAs because FTAs interrupt normal patterns of communication and sometimes require non-
supportive communication. The awkwardness of non-supportive communication is demonstrated by Pomerantz (1984), who studied assessments of disagreement. She found that long silences, delays, and stall words like "uh" or "like" commonly occur in disagreement assessments. A disagreement assessment is a type of FTA, and an HBH message (though not necessarily a disagreement assessment) is non-supportive communication and is likely to be avoided if possible. Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest that if an FTA cannot be avoided, people will "employ certain strategies to minimize the threat" (p. 68). Brown and Levinson (1987) discuss these strategies.

Strategies for doing FTAs are relevant to HBH messages because they can be used to describe message experiences. Rituals of deference studied by Goffman (1956) are also relevant for the same reason. For example, Brown and Levinson (1987) distinguish between positive and negative politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and characterize aspects of these concepts that can be identified in HBH messages, like actions done on or off record, actions done literally or figuratively, and actions done with or without redress. Similarly, rituals of deference (Goffman, 1956) can also be identified in HBH messages. For example, a person may intentionally put an arm around their partner while giving an HBH message to communicate support. This would be an example of a presentational ritual (Goffman, 1956). A person may also put considerable thought into the appropriate time and place to give the message, making sure to avoid scenarios that would exacerbate the message. Anything avoided, like refraining from giving the message in public, is an example of an avoidance ritual (Goffman, 1956). A person may also avoid belaboring the hurtful aspect of the message, in essence, emphasizing closedness about the hurtful topic. In this way, strategies of politeness and rituals of deference can be compared to
relevant dialectic contradictions, and it is the goal of this study to identify how strategies and rituals are used in HBH messages to manage dialectic contradiction.

**Strategies for Doing Face Threatening Acts**

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), actors who must perform an FTA weigh three considerations. The first is the want to communicate the FTA, the second is the desire to do it quickly, and the third is the want to preserve face when possible. Brown and Levinson (1987) outline the process of performing an FTA and provide a schema of strategies that include uses and advice for each. FTAs include face-humbling acts such as accepting offers, accepting a debt, and giving thanks; and face profaning acts such as cowering, losing control, and acting stupid. These things that are not necessarily hurtful, however, because HBH messages are also FTAs, understanding these strategies is still appropriate.

An FTA that is carried out can first be distinguished by being *on record or off record* (Brown & Levinson, 1987). If it is *on record*, the FTA is done clearly and unambiguously. There can be no dispute about the intention. "You drink too much," is an example. It is honest and leaves little room for misinterpretation. An FTA that is *off record* is ambiguous and can lay claim to multiple intentions. "Don't you think you should take a night off?" is an example because the speaker is hinting at something that is excessive behavior but cannot be held to have made that claim. Figures of speech like rhetorical questions, understatements, and ironies factor heavily into this strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This is considered tactful and cooperative. It attempts to avoid conflict. However, the ambiguity of *off record* FTAs may lead to misunderstandings.

*On record* FTAs can be distinguished further by being performed with or without redress. Redress means to give face, so actions performed *with* redress are done to limit face damage by
indicating that any threat to face is unintended or not desired (1987). For example, prefacing a criticism with, "I am only saying this to help," is an action of redress. It emphasizes support for the recipient's face. On the contrary, an FTA performed without redress is said to be done "baldly," (1987; 69). This strategy does not hold back. It takes, "You drink too much," and intensifies it to, "Stop drinking or else!" An act such as this might be warranted if a behavior is destructive and needs to cease. Other contexts where FTAs are typically performed without redress include situations where urgency holds priority over face (e.g., emergencies), and circumstances where face concerns are minimal (e.g., playful jokes).

**Politeness.** Brown and Levinson (1987) break down actions done with redress into two forms of politeness. Positive politeness is approach-based and respects a recipient's positive face, which means a recipient's desire to be accepted and liked by most others (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Examples of positive politeness are any actions that communicate a sense of inclusion to the recipient. When giving an HBH message, a speaker may talk in terms of "our relationship" and use language like "we" and "us" to communicate togetherness. This allows the speaker to emphasize the couple over the individual, and to not place blame: for example, a message might state "The relationship needs…" or, "Our relationship would improve if…" instead of accusing or berating a partner. Brown and Levinson (1987) write, "A criticism, with the assertion of mutual friendship, may lose its sting" (p. 72), and in this way, positive politeness can reduce the amount of face-threat in a message.

Negative politeness is avoidance-based and respects a recipient's negative face, which means the recipient's desire to be unimpeded (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Examples of negative politeness are any actions that refrain from violating a recipient's personal space, desired actions, or sense of privacy. If an action does infringe a recipient's negative face, measures taken to
apologize for the violation, soften the blow, or give the recipient a way out are also considered examples of negative politeness. In an HBH message, a partner may exercise negative politeness and deliver the message in an environment that is private and comfortable for the recipient, an environment that is not confining and allows the recipient to freely step out if needed. A partner may also exercise negative politeness and avoid bringing up, or dwelling on sensitive topics. In this way, negative politeness allows deference to be paid to a recipient.

**Deference.** Positive politeness and negative politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987) are similar to two rituals of deference studied by Goffman (1956), presentational rituals and avoidance rituals. Deference means practicing behaviors that ought to be carried out because they are appropriate and just. Deference, like politeness, does *what is right*. A failure to do this can result in negative and restricting sanctions. When Goffman (1956) studied deference, he did so with this in mind, because he conducted his research at a mental hospital. In great detail, he analyzed rituals of good behavior by examining people who were quarantined for not maintaining it. Two rituals, presentational and avoidance rituals, described in Goffman's (1956) paper can be seen as precursors to Brown and Levinson's (1987) discussion of positive and negative politeness, which are the two ways FTA's can be performed *on record* and with redress.

A presentational ritual is an action that indicates the intentions of an interaction. In Goffman's (1956) words, presentational rituals are "acts through which the individual makes specific attestations to recipients concerning how he regards them and how he treat them in the on-coming interaction" (p. 485). Presentational rituals can communicate esteem for a recipient's face. Examples include greetings, gestures, and salutations. For example, making eye contact with someone and shaking their hand is a sign of peace. Patting someone on the shoulder is a sign of togetherness. Saluting a higher official is a sign of respect. When giving an HBH
message, a partner may put their arm around the other's shoulder, or take the other's hand as a sign of support. A partner may end the message with a hug as a further sign of support, and say something endearing like, "I love you."

An avoidance ritual according to Goffman (1956) is "what is not to be done" in an interaction (p. 485). Like negative politeness, an avoidance ritual pays deference to a recipient's negative face by maintaining physical or topical distance and respecting privacy. Goffman (1956) compares exercising avoidance rituals to respecting the "ideal spheres" of other people, defined by Simmel (1950) as orbs of dignity surrounding people. The "ideal sphere" adjusts in size in accordance to the context of the situation. The sphere grows smaller to grant some people and some topics more intimacy, and swells to keep others farther way. For example, best friends can poke fun at each other but strangers on a bus can only make brief eye contact. Any behavior that works to counteract violations of negative face is an avoidance ritual. An example of an avoidance ritual in an HBH message might be refraining from giving the message in public. If a message is given in private, the recipient is not put on the spot and information that concerns the state of the relationship is not advertised. In this way, avoidance rituals can reduce the face-threat of a message.

Summary

The point of identifying practices of politeness and rituals of deference in HBH messages between romantic partners is to see how different communication strategies relate to managing relevant dialectic contradictions in a way that reduces the inherent face-threat of these messages. On its own, honesty in relationships can be difficult to maintain. When honesty combines with hurt, the stakes are raised tenfold, especially when one must be honest and hurtful to a loved one. Research has shown that honesty is expected between romantic partners. It has also shown
positive and supportive communication to be expected as well (Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994). Being both honest and hurtful to a partner breaks these expectations, and is detrimental to a relationship (Zhang & Stafford, 2008). Careful execution is required if an agreeable outcome is to be reached.

Dialectics is proposed as a framework for this exploration because it provides a model for managing relational contradiction. Zhang and Stafford (2008) have shown how contradiction in HBH messages can potentially lower levels of satisfaction in relationships. Dialectics can analyze how the honesty and hurt of a message is tweaked or bent to fit the situation. Dialectics can analyze how a message is balanced, and how factors of autonomy-connection, openness-closedness, and predictability-novelty contribute to the shaping of a message. In this study, dialectic contradictions in HBH messages are compared to strategies of FTAs, practices of politeness, and rituals of deference to isolate strategies that reduce face-threat. Returning to the example of an HBH message where a wife tells her husband that his eyesight is getting too poor for him to drive, certain questions must be asked: how independent or independent is the couple? How stable and predictable is their relationships? How open or closed is the message? Which strategies of performing FTAs are used? Which form of politeness and which rituals of deference are used? Are there any other dialectics that are relevant? This study examines HBH messages in romantic relationships using the following research questions:

RQ 1. How are openness-closedness, autonomy-connection, and predictability-novelty relevant? Which dialectics, if any, outside of the primary three are relevant?

RQ 2. Which strategies of politeness and deference emerge as common themes in message delivery?

RQ 3. How do techniques of message delivery work to manage dialectic contradiction?
Method

This study seeks to understand the experience of delivering an HBH message to a romantic partner. The general framework used is dialectics. Dialectics has been studied qualitatively in past research by Graham (2003), who identified dialectic contradictions in postmarital relationships. Braithwaite and Baxter (2006) also used a qualitative approach to identify dialectic contradictions in step-family relationships, and Mikucki (2007) identified dialectic contradictions in mother-in-law/daughter-in-law dyads qualitatively as well. With these precedents, this study will also be conducted qualitatively. This allows participants to freely interpret the meanings of their experience (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). More specifically, the phenomenological approach will be used to uncover the common experiences associated with this type of messaging.

The goal of phenomenology is to capture the essence of something. Individual experiences are collected and reduced down to "grasp the very nature" of the phenomenon (van Mann, 1990, p. 177). What results is a rich, detailed, and comprehensive description that accounts for "what" is experienced by participants and "how" it is experienced. The description is guided by philosophical presuppositions linked to phenomenology. Stewart and Mickunas (1990) highlight the four major philosophical ideas that underpin phenomenology:

1. Phenomenology honors traditional tasks by returning to the search for wisdom
2. Phenomenology suspends judgments about what is real
3. Phenomenology always directs consciousness towards an object
4. Phenomenology does not separate consciousness from the object; reality is perceived by the individual through the context of the experience.
Based on the philosophical underpinnings, researchers have outlined particular phenomenological approaches. This study will use the transcendental approach described by Moustakas (1994). The transcendental approach considers description of a phenomenon to be prior to explanation. To maintain this mentality, the researcher must bracket out personal experience in order to view the experience of the participant with a fresh and unbiased perspective. Each time is like new. This, of course, cannot be achieved absolutely but stands as a worthwhile goal (Moustakas, 1994); it is suggested that the researcher begin by examining personal experience as a way to bracket it out from the participant's experience (Creswell, 2007).

The experience is, therefore, confronted and set aside giving the participants, one by one, a full and complete voice. It will be their quotes and statements that build themes, each one viewed as unique. The challenge is to find common ground among diversity. The purpose of the researcher is to ask the appropriate questions and to collect and assemble the relevant responses. The following passages provide descriptions of the participants and procedures, and the strategy for data analysis.

**Participants**

Participants needed be able to speak in detail about an experience of delivering an HBH message to a romantic partner. They supplied an overview of their relationship and gave relevant context to the situation. Their testimonies included the impetus for giving the message, their game-plan for approaching the message, a reconstruction of the message episode, and a statement about the consequences of the message. Participants did not need to speak about an experience involving a partner who they are currently with, but all of the experience involved a partner from a relationship that is, or was, exclusive and committed. This intensified the message. To screen for this, participants indicated the status of their relationship at the time of
the message from choices of exclusive dating, engaged, married, and other. They also indicated in their own words how serious they considered the relationship to be.

Nine participants were recruited. This number complies with Polkinghorne's (1989) recommendation that phenomenological studies have between five and twenty-five participants. Participants were solicited through a non-traditional student newsletter at a medium-sized Midwestern university. 3 non-traditional students were also solicited by snowballing. Using college students as participants was appropriate because college campuses are places of high social activity, and presumably many students are involved in romantic relationships. In fact, Vangelisti's (1994) study of hurtful messages also used college students as participants and she found that romantic relations were commonly cited as a topic that elicited hurt. In this study, non-traditional students were targeted because they are typically older and have more experience to draw from. They are also more likely to be involved in committed and exclusive relationships. There was no reward given to those who participated, aside from the opportunity to talk through a confusing or problematic event from their past. This posed a minimal psychological risk for participants because it may have been distressing for some to revisit painful memories. Of course, participants are allowed to read the completed study which might help shape future interactions in a positive way.

**Procedures**

At the onset, an advertisement for the study was placed in a student newsletter. Interested students were emailed a consent form and an open-ended survey (Appendix B). Zhang and Stafford (2008) also used open-ended surveys when they studied the FM ramifications of HBH messages in romantic relationships. The purpose of this survey was to screen potential participants for the actual study. Participants were asked to provide, if possible,
a brief description of a time when they told a romantic partner something that was honest, and at the same time hurtful. They were told that this experience could include a current romantic partner or an ex-partner. They were also told that the experience must involve a relationship that is, or was, exclusive and committed. Again, to confirm this they were asked to indicate the status of the relationship at the time of the message from the choices of exclusive dating, engaged, married, and other. They were also asked to provide a personal statement of how serious they considered the relationship to be; Vangelisti’s (1994) list of hurtful message speech acts and their descriptions was included to help participants choose an appropriate experience to reconstruct. Asking participants to reconstruct a conversational event in writing is a technique used successfully in Vangelisti’s (1994) study about the types and topics of hurtful messages, and Vangelisti and Young's (2000) study about the intentionality of hurtful messages. Students were told their participation is completely voluntary. The survey also assured confidentiality and asked for basic demographic and contact information (name, phone number, and email address), and asked participants if they would be willing to take part in a follow-up interview.

Semi-structured interviews were arranged with interested and available participants. This type of interviews allowed participants to describe the event in their own terms, rather than being confined by close-ended research defined terms. Graham (2003) interviewed participants in her study about dialectic contradictions in post-marital relationships. Braithwaite and Baxter (2006) also interviewed participants in their study about dialectic contradictions in step-family relationships, and Mikucki (2007) cited the importance of semi-structured respondent interviews (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) in her study about mother-in-law/daughter-in-law dyads. Semi-structured interviews were used in the current study because they are flexible.
The interviews followed an informal set of questions but were flexible and also pursued spontaneous lines of questioning when the interview dictated it. This technique gave participants room to provide their unique perspectives. The questions (Appendix C) focused on the lead up to the message, the message episode, and the aftermath. Participants were asked how openness-closedness, autonomy-connection, and predictability-novelty were relevant to their message experiences. They were also asked to speak about their verbal and nonverbal behavior during the message episode to uncover strategies of politeness and rituals of deference that were used. Finally, participants were asked about the state of their relationship following the message.

Interviews were in-depth and as comprehensive as possible, a must for phenomenological research (Creswell, 2007). They were conducted in either a university office or classroom that provided a private and professional environment and they were audio recorded and transcribed. Participants were reassured of their confidentiality. Pseudonyms were used in place of real names. Recordings and transcriptions are stored in secured computer files and locked file cabinets.

**Data Analysis**

The transcribed interviews were the point of entry for analysis. They were investigated carefully and thoroughly. Reading them, rereading them, making notations, setting them aside, revisiting them, rereading them, and making more notations was essential for describing, classifying, and interpreting the data. A thematic analysis, as explained by Aronson (1994), was used as grounding. This gave the analysis a direction to follow. The process began by identifying a common pattern of experience. In this case, the common pattern was an HBH message delivery. Themes and sub-themes were then drawn from this. A theme is defined as a unit derived from a pattern such as, “conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities,
meanings, feelings, or folk sayings and proverbs” (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984; pg. 131). I searched for recurring activities. For example, all of the participants were asked to talk about the three primary dialectic contradictions in relevance to their HBH message experience.

Participants were classified as to how they spoke about openness-closedness, autonomy-connection, and predictability-novelty. Openness became a sub-theme because each participant described their message as open. Further, openness was broken down into honesty being more important than hurt, venting, and giving payback in effort to either create positive change in the recipient, create positive change in the relationship, or release tension that was bottled up.

Autonomy-connection and predictability-novelty were broken down in a similar fashion. For example, a sub-theme of autonomy was a sense of independence which made it easier to speak freely about a subject even though it was hurtful. Techniques and rituals were also broken down into themes. For example, one way positive politeness was characterized was through the use of additional compliments to soften the hurt. Terms of endearment were also used. These became sub-themes. Verbal and nonverbal behaviors were also themes classified under rituals of deference. Sub-themes of verbal behavior were conversational or playful tones. A Sub-theme for nonverbal behavior was quiet gestures. Participants’ quotes were used to support each theme.

This is a step Moustakas (1994) refers to as horizontalization, where significant statements are grouped together appropriately.

The next step developed meaning from these groups of statements. The themes and sub-themes were compared to the reviewed literature to piece together a comprehensive picture. The descriptions operated on three structures: textual, structural, and essential (Moustakas (1994). This means it focused on the events as they happened, the contextual elements involved, and the invariant aspects of the phenomenon. For example, how did a given sub-theme of verbal
behavior relate to openness-closedness? What ritual is acted out? What form of politeness is utilized? Does this indicate a willingness to disclose, or withhold information? What does it mean to the message as a whole? Deducing meaning from descriptions was highly subjective and was carried out with the aid of another researcher. This researcher was briefed about the study’s rationale, the relevant literature, the nature of a thematic analysis, and the transcendental phenomenological approach. Themes and sub-themes were then discussed and debated before being agreed upon. Each theme was supported by significant statements and quotes from the participants.
Results

In romantic relationships partners expect an exchange of honest and emotionally supportive communication. Delivering an honest but hurtful message to a romantic partner poses a confounding dilemma where emotional support must be compromised in order for honesty to be shared. Past research (Zhang & Stafford, 2008) has uncovered this relational contradiction and has examined it using Face Management Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Cupach & Metts, 1994; Goffman, 1967). This study aims to understand the experience of HBH messages in romantic relationships through understanding the surrounding dialectic contradictions. Further, the strategies of politeness and deference used in HBH message deliveries can be examined for explanations about how they work to manage dialectic contradiction. The results presented in this chapter focus on dialectic contradiction and message delivery.

**Dialectic contradiction** is divided into three sections that focus on trends in openness-closedness, autonomy-connection, and predictability-novelty. Because HBH messages are acts of disclosure, the section on openness-closedness focuses on how and why openness occurred. Autonomy-connection explores the level of interdependence in couples. Predictability-novelty helps explain the stability of the relationships at the time of delivery of messages. **Message delivery** is divided into three sections as well: FTA strategies, politeness techniques, and deference. FTA strategies focus on the implementation of redressive actions in message deliveries. Politeness techniques focus on the specificities of redressive actions used in message deliveries. Finally, deference reports on presentational and avoidance rituals employed in message deliveries. Altogether, message delivery explains how hurt is balanced in HBH messages to soften the blow.
Nine participants are referenced in the results section. A biographical sketch of each one is displayed in the table below to help enrich the descriptions of events that follow. The table provides basic information including each participant's pseudonym, age, and sex. It also documents their HBH message and the status of their relationship at the time.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>HBH Message</th>
<th>Relationship Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Johnson</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>She told her husband his temper was a problem.</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Underwood</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>She told her husband he was moving too slowly on a home renovation project and she preferred contracting professional labor.</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Brewer</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>She told her boyfriend she would not move in with him because he was lazy, messy, and apathetic.</td>
<td>Exclusive Dating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Smith</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>She told her fiancé he was rude to her at a gathering with his work friends.</td>
<td>Engaged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. David</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>He told his girlfriend she did not satisfy his desire for witty and meaningful conversation.</td>
<td>Exclusive Dating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Stevens</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>She told her husband he converses too loudly in public and this behavior is rude and sometimes embarrassing.</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Brown</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>He told his wife she was unsupportive while his father was dying.</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Chase</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>He told his girlfriend he did not enjoy going on vacation with her family and he would not do it again</td>
<td>Exclusive Dating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss White</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>She told her boyfriend he was lazy and this violated her idea of what a man should be.</td>
<td>Exclusive Dating</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Dialectic Contradiction**

Each HBH message experience is unique, possessing its own context, circumstance, and characteristics. However, themes have emerged that classify typical experiences. Participants overwhelmingly described their message deliveries as more open than closed. They tended to describe the status of their relationships as more autonomous than connected, and they spoke more about predictability than novelty. The trend towards openness seemed to reflect participants’ need to put their messages "out there" in an honest, plainly stated, and matter-of-fact
way. Some participants felt compelled to be open to induce change in the relationship (i.e., to break a problematic behavioral pattern or to give advice), and most participants also spoke about the need to vent. The trend towards autonomy seemed to indicate participants’ tendencies to be more independent than interdependent. A person who is independent relies less on the emotional support from others compared to someone who desires interdependence. Perhaps this could mean a person who is more independent is more apt to speak their mind openly because the possibility of losing connection does not threaten their autonomy. Finally, predictability seemed to be a factor in more HBH messages than novelty. The subject of most messages was something predictable about a partner that needed to change ("His anger gets in the way," "He's lazy," "She was treating me like shit"). A few participants also said predictability made it easier to prepare for the message. In the following sections these themes and others are discussed in more detail.

**Openness-Closedness.** This dialectic contradiction addresses transparency of information. Although hurtful details of HBH messages may be downplayed, a significant degree of honesty must openly be disclosed, along with hurt, to qualify it as an HBH message. Nine participants described their messages as more open than closed. Perhaps it is even better to say that participants described HBH messages as events of openness, or moments when openness was emphasized over closedness. Each message occurred when openness was more important than hurting a partner’s feelings. Openness was more important than causing hurt when (1) a change was desired in the recipient, and (2) to satisfy the need to vent.

In the first two examples, openness to induce change is emphasized over the need to vent. Mrs. Johnson needed to be open with her husband because he could not control his anger, which had become a disturbing pattern in the relationship. Mrs. Johnson was fifty-two years old and
married to her husband for thirty-two years at the time. They were expecting their first
grandchild and she knew her husband's temper also caused worry in their son. She was afraid
their son would be apprehensive about bringing the baby over for visits. Mrs. Johnson needed to
advise her husband to work on controlling his temper. She said:

> It became important for me to tell my husband that he needed to get his anger and
temper under control. Our first grandchild was on the way and I felt that if he did not do
this our son would not want to bring our grandchild to our home.

This terrified her. It was important for Mrs. Johnson to share the experience of becoming a
grandparent with her husband. Therefore, she decided to confront him. She said, “I gave him
my reason and told him his anger gets in the way.” She desired a change in him that would
benefit their relationship. She was open because sharing the experience of becoming a
grandparent took precedent over the possibility of hurting her husband's feelings. She was
willing to risk a negative reaction in effort to prevent an even worse consequence.

Mrs. Underwood used openness with her husband to make a suggestion. She was forty-
two years old at the time. She and her husband were renovating their house and she did not want
him to renovate it on his own because he worked slowly, which would detract from time they
could spend together. She suggested hiring outside help to complete the job. She said:

> We were building a house together and still had a lot to do. He had a lot of expertise and
talent but was an extreme perfectionist and slow because of his fear of failure. I advised
him to contract outside help and had to explain with figures and proof that it was a good
move financially and timewise.

She said the message challenged his sense of masculinity because he felt like it was his
responsibility to do the job on his own. To Mrs. Underwood, though, the project was stressful
and time consuming which was problematic for their relationship. Openness was more important that causing hurt because she wanted to spend more quality time together.

Miss Brewer used openness with her boyfriend to give him advice and also to vent. Her message was a response to her boyfriend's request to move-in together. She told him it was absolutely out of the question because he was lazy, messy, and apathetic. She said:

I told him that I could never move in with him because of the fact that he had no basic cleaning skills and that he really did not have a steady enough of a job and that he probably never would.

Miss Brewer was seventeen at the time and still in high school so she was also unable to live with him because her parents would not approve of it. She said her parents would see his disorganization and lack of ambition as "signs of weakness" and would not support a decision to move in, which she included in the message. She said she was open because she wanted to encourage him to clean up his act. "I kind of wanted him to have a wake-up call. I was trying to make him a better person." Openness, therefore, took precedence because hurt was a necessary step to improvement. She also said the message forced itself out. "Apparently it had been, you know, in my subconscious somewhere that 'hey this has got to change,' and that was just the opportunity and time it came out." She needed to vent and was presented with a scenario that allowed her to.

Miss Smith was open with her fiancé to express dissatisfaction with their experience together at a gathering with his work friends. She wanted to induce change and also needed to vent. She was unhappy because her fiancé was inconsiderate and closed-off to her at the social event, and she did not want this type of behavior to continue. She said:
[My fiancé] and I went out for drinks with some friends of his from work whom I had either never met or met only briefly. During our time out I felt that I wasn't properly introduced to his friends and didn't fit into their conversation. Therefore, I felt uncomfortable and left out. After we came home I expressed to [my fiancé] that I would appreciate it if he would do a better job of introducing me and including me in conversation so we can have a good time.

Miss Smith was twenty-three years old and had been with her fiancé for two-and-a-half years at the time. The purpose of the message was to make sure this experience was not repeated. She said, "I wasn't necessarily angry about it, but it's just something that I wanted to have changed."

For Miss Smith, openness was more important than causing hurt because she needed to bring attention to a problem and set a new expectation.

In the next five examples, openness was used to vent more than to induce change in a partner. The first two examples show participants venting just to vent, despite not believing that change was possible. Mr. David felt fundamentally compelled to be open with his girlfriend about his dissatisfaction with her inability to connect intellectually with him in conversation. He said:

I told my girlfriend that she lacked the requisite intelligence to maintain a conversation that was interesting and intellectually stimulating enough to satisfy my desire for meaningful communication and witty exchange. I guess I wanted to communicate that she was not at the same or relative caliber of intelligence as I.

Mr. David was twenty-four years old. He did not think the message would induce change or improvement in his girlfriend’s conversational abilities. However, he needed to deliver the message to vent. He said:
I just felt like I wanted to express my honest feelings, and that I think that I did it so that I would feel better not keeping it bottled up or hidden. I just wanted to put it out there. I definitely didn't think that she was going to change her ways, or really has the ability to, because I don't think it's under her control.

Still, it was important for Mr. David to confront the issue openly rather than wrestle with it privately. It was as if he felt guilty for keeping it withheld and that he owed to himself and his girlfriend to vocalize it, despite its harshness.

Mrs. Stevens was also open with her husband despite disbelieving that change was possible. Mrs. Stevens was forty-seven years old and was married to her husband for twenty years at the time. She told her husband he was carrying on a conversation so loudly at their son's curling practice that it made it impossible for others to converse. She said:

I told my husband that he is loud. He was inside a building that has a dividing wall as soon as you enter. I didn’t know he was there, but as soon as I entered the building I could hear him. I said 'You were kind of embarrassing [their son], he was shrinking in his seat, and you didn’t have to be so loud.'

She told him this type of behavior was inconsiderate and rude, but delivered the message without much faith that it would be effective. When asked if she got her message across satisfactorily she said, "Probably, but will it make any difference? Probably not." She added that his reaction was, "This is who I am and I'm not sure if I can change." The purpose for delivering the message seemed to be the need to verbally acknowledge her thoughts on the matter, the need to vent.

The final three examples of openness show episodes of spontaneous venting. These messages were driven by anger or frustration. Mr. Brown was open with his wife about her lack
of support during a period of time when his father was dying of a debilitating disease. He delivered the message because "enough was enough." He said:

My father died last March. It took nearly three years from the time he was diagnosed until he died, a very stressful period for all of us. I traveled [from Wisconsin to the east coast] nearly every month to be with him and offer some respite for my mother. My wife often challenged my father's condition and suggested my mother was manipulating information to get me to visit more often. A month or so after he died, I told my wife I loved her but I felt like she treated me like shit during much of his illness.

Mr. Brown was forty-five years old and married to his wife for eighteen years at the time. He said, "The message was probably [a result of] built up, built up stress over several months. I think it came out spontaneously." It was a defiant "strongly worded message" pulled out by pent-up frustration.

Mr. Chase was also frustrated, and angry, when he was open with his girlfriend about his dissatisfaction with the experience of going on vacation with her family. He was twenty-three years old and with his girlfriend for two years at the time. He said, "After taking the vacation I told my girlfriend I would never go on another vacation with her family again." He felt like her parents disapproved of him. Mr. Chase did not wait long after getting off the plane to deliver this message, confronting his girlfriend on the car ride home from the airport. He said, "It kind of just happened. I wasn't very careful or cautious about the things I said. There were a lot of things that were just said based on emotions and how I felt." It was a spontaneous blow-up.

Finally, Miss White was open with her boyfriend about his laziness because she was "fed up." She said:
I had mentioned something about him I didn't like and it was his laziness. I brought it up by asking why he keeps taking half days off of work every Friday. It just progressed from there by going from work habits to outside of work habits. I simply said that I was not used to being with a man who sleeps until 10:30 a.m. and quite frankly I didn't like it. I told him in my eyes it was unacceptable for a "man" to be like that.

Miss White was twenty five years old and had been with her boyfriend for less than a year at the time. She said the message had been brooding for a long time and eventually came out spontaneously. The message was in response to complaints her boyfriend made about her. She said:

I had been wanting to talk to him about this for a while, and before that he'd been yelling at me for things that I was doing wrong, and so finally I kind of just was fed up and it was, it was planned, but not at that moment so it was kind of spontaneous.

I was like, 'Well, if you don't like this and this and this about me, well I'm going to let you know what I don't like about you.'

In a way, venting the message was a way for her to issue payback. She could no longer keep her thoughts on the matter to herself. If his guns were out firing, hers would be too.

Openness was a primary objective for participants when delivering HBH messages. Participants delivered messages when they felt the need to express something or put something out there. This occurred when openness was more important than causing hurt. This was the case for some participants when they wanted to induce positive change. Openness was also more important than causing hurt to satisfy the need to vent. Some participants vented purposefully to release inner tension so they would feel better. Other participants blew-up and vented
spontaneously in episodes of anger, frustration, and payback. In each example, openness was emphasized over closedness.

**Autonomy-Connection.** This contradiction addresses the independent or interdependent status of a couple. Couples can be either more autonomous or more connected in their day-to-day lives, meaning they either get along fine without the other or they truly depend on the other’s presence and support. Most participants described their relationships as more autonomous than connected. Most participants, therefore, felt more independent than interdependent. This possibly made it easier for these participants to say something hurtful because hurting someone's feelings does not threaten autonomy (whereas someone who is more interdependent risks losing connection by saying something hurtful). Two participants, however, did describe their relationships as more connected than autonomous. These participants gave messages that addressed the prospect of losing connection. Their messages were attempts to restore or preserve connection.

The first five examples in this section concentrate on participants who described their relationships as more autonomous. Mrs. Stevens described her relationship as more autonomous and indicated that this made it easier to say something hurtful. Mrs. Stevens is the participant who told her husband that he converses too loudly in public, which can be inconsiderate to others and embarrassing to be around. She described her relationship in the following way:

I think we're pretty independent, we kind of do our own things, certainly each of us can get a long without the other for a while if we have to, um we like being with each other, but no, I think of other couples that I know who are very dependent on one another and have a hard time without the other being around.
She then implied that it was easy to deliver the message. She explained, “I don’t think I really sat up there and said ‘Ok, well this is going to hurt his feelings.'” She was comfortable enough to candidly criticize his behavior.

Mr. Chase described his relationship as more autonomous and indicated that it made it easier to say something hurtful. Mr. Chase is the participant who told his girlfriend that he did not enjoy going on vacation with her family and would never do it again. Mr. Chase’s relationship was long-distance. He said, "We communicated a lot but didn't get to spend a lot of time together, but we were stable, we'd been together for a while already." He indicated that he was secure in saying something hurtful to her. He said, "I felt comfortable saying something she might not agree with because we've talked about a lot of things over the years." Through past experience, he knew it was safe to speak his mind.

Miss White described her relationship as more autonomous and exhibited ease with saying something hurtful to her partner. Miss White is the participant who told her boyfriend that he is lazy and laziness violates her idea of what a "man" should be. She said, "I'm very independent. I don't need a man for something, but I do enjoy their, like, his company, so we did things together but not once have I ever depended on him for doing anything for me." This quote demonstrates that Miss White is comfortable with autonomy and is very secure in her independence. She is also very outspoken. Recall that she said, "If you don't like this and this and this about me, well I'm going to let you know what I don't like about you." A sense of security and outspokenness seemed to make it easier for Miss White to say something hurtful. It was easy for her to be blunt.

Mr. David described his relationship as more. Mr. David is the participant who told his girlfriend that she did not satisfy his desire for witty and meaningful conversation. He said there
was a difference in perspective between him and his girlfriend regarding the idea of autonomy-connection in their relationship. "I would say that she was moderately interdependent where as I was, and am, independent," he said. When speaking about the message episode he said:

I think I was relatively unmoved by it, as I generally am in these situations. I really wasn't affected by it because I was just glad I said what I needed to say and however she wanted react was her prerogative.

He added, "I don't know if it helped me, but it definitely didn't hurt me." These quotes seem to indicate that Mr. David has a strong inner self. He had the nerve to speak his mind despite the consequence of hurting his girlfriend's feelings.

Miss Brewer described her relationship as more autonomous indicating that distance and circumstance were the main contributing factors. However, protecting her independence seemed to be an important aspect of her message too, and she was strong and secure enough to convey that. Miss Brewer is the participant who told her boyfriend she would not move in with him because he was lazy, messy, and apathetic. Describing her relationship she said, "We were independent because basically I lived in [x] and he lived in [y]. He lived in his own place in [y] and I lived with my parents still." Therefore, logistically it was not possible for them to live together or even be in the same town. Apart from that, though, Miss Brewer was also adamant about not wanting to increase connection in their relationship. Speaking about the message episode she said:

He suggested, "Well maybe you can move in with me," and I kind of, I think the first thing that flashed through my head before I did anything was, "There is no way, like why would I do something like that? With you?"
This quote shows that Miss Brewer was apprehensive about becoming more interdependent with her boyfriend. She was not ready to take that step. Further, she was willing to stand up for her feelings despite the potential to hurt her boyfriend's feelings.

The final two examples in this section display the two participants who described their relationships as more connected than autonomous. These exceptions to the trend of autonomy are interesting to note. In both examples the HBH messages were delivered to counteract relational connection that was being threatened. Both examples also come from participants who were in long-standing relationships. Mrs. Johnson described her relationship as more connected and indicated that her message was an attempt to maintain interdependence. Mrs. Johnson is the participant who told her husband to get control of his anger so they, as a couple, could enjoy the birth of their new grandchild together. She said, "We spend a lot of time together and do a lot of things as a couple. We are very interdependent." Speaking about the message episode she said, “I told him that I was worried that the kids would not want to come to our house if he continued to behave that way,” and added she was not willing to say, “If you don't change I'm going to leave you.” It was important for her to guard their connection. The purpose of her message was to protect the interdependence of their relationship and family system.

Mrs. Underwood also described her relationship as more connected and indicated that the purpose of her message was so she could "spend more time" with her husband. Mrs. Underwood is the participant who told her husband he was working too slowly on a home renovation project and she preferred contracting professional help instead. Speaking about her relationship she said, "We were very close. We were very serious. We were connected.” The home renovation project demanded a lot of time and energy and it detracted from quality time they could spend
together. Mrs. Underwood wanted her husband to "farm out the work," and emphasized that her reasoning was because it would allow them to be happier together.

Aside from the final two exceptions, participants delivering HBH messages tended to describe their relationships as more autonomous than connected. Participants who reported feeling autonomous in their relationships were more independent and perhaps more willing to say something hurtful to their partner. These participants seemed to have strong inner selves and outspoken personalities, making it easier for them to speak their minds. Participants who reported feeling more connected in their relationships delivered HBH messages that addressed the threat of losing connection.

**Predictability-Novelty.** This contradiction addresses the day-to-day expectations of a relationship and its forward outlook. Predictable relationships are characterized by habitual routines and stability, while novel relationships are more spontaneous, whimsical, or unstable. Relationships, however, are very complex. A person may feel that some aspects of their relationship are predictable while other aspects are novel. For example, Mrs. Stevens said:

I think our relationship is pretty predictable, and I think part of that predictability is that we have a son who is in school and we have commitments to him and we are not able to do things on the spur of the moment, but sometimes it happens, like I said to my husband and son the other day, "Why don't you guys go skiing," because my son didn't have school that day. So it's not the drudgery of the same old thing every single day either.

Three themes were uncovered regarding predictability-novelty and HBH messages. First, participants delivered HBH messages to address troubling behaviors that had become predictable. Therefore, they wanted to put an end to stable patterns that were detrimental to their relationship. Second, some participants indicated that a degree of predictability made it easier to
plan and prepare for delivering HBH messages. These participants were able to choose the most congenial times and locations to carry out their messages. Third, two participants indicated that general vagueness or uncertainty regarding the future were important factors in their messages.

The first five examples display instances where participants delivered messages to put an end to predictable and troubling patterns. Mrs. Johnson’s message fits this category. Her message, again, addressed her husband’s anger problem. She wanted him to exercise more control over his temper because they were about to welcome their first grandchild into the world. She said, "When somebody is allowed to let their emotions and anger to go out of control and it involves more family members and younger family members then you need to control it." His anger had become a predictable pattern that needed to be changed. Her message was an attempt to create a new predictable pattern, one where her husband routinely behaved himself.

Miss Smith’s message addressed a rude behavior she did not want her fiancé to repeat. Miss Smith told her fiancé he was rude to her at a social gathering with his work friends. He did not introduce her adequately and failed to include her in the conversation. Further, he did not seem to realize that he was rude. She said, "He was not even aware of the fact," which was very upsetting to her. She decided to confront him so it would not happen again. She said, "It was just something I wanted to have changed, so I said, 'This is how I'm feeling. What are your reactions?'" She did not want to have to worry about this in the future. She wanted to create a new predictable pattern by establishing her expectations for the future.

Miss Brewer and Miss White both gave messages that addressed the laziness of their boyfriends. In both cases laziness and apathy were predictable and undesired. Miss Brewer told her boyfriend she would not move in with him because he was lazy, messy, and apathetic. She said:
I had spent time cleaning up his house and was basically thinking, 'What the heck does he do with his time?' All he does is work and then drink a lot too, but I was like, 'What is he doing? Where is he going with himself? How is he going to progress further with his supposed career?'

His aimlessness and lack of direction seemed to be a constant pattern and he showed no initiative to break from it. Similarly, Miss White told her boyfriend that he was lazy and did not fulfill her idea of what a "man" should be. She said, "He was taking half days off of work on Fridays and that's money he's throwing away and to me that's a sign of laziness, and I don't think a man should be lazy, I really don't." Again, his laziness was a predictable pattern that Miss White wanted changed.

Mr. Brown's message addressed his wife's lack of support during a stressful period in his life. Mr. Brown told his wife she "treated him like shit" while his father was dying of a debilitating disease. According to Mr. Brown, her unsupportive behavior became a constant predictable pattern. When talking about the message episode he said:

I think she was just giving me some more grief about something else and I just wanted to put a stop to what I considered additional, additional mistreatment. I said, 'I feel like you treated me like shit,' and then I gave her the argument, the backing, listing off probably only maybe a handful of episodes out of a hundred.

Mr. Brown repeated the word "additional" to emphasize the mistreatment as constant and ongoing. Further, he indicates that there were "hundreds" of episodes of mistreatment. The purpose of Mr. Brown's message was to put an end to this predictable pattern.

The next three examples display instances where participants used predictability to plan and prepare for delivering their HBH messages. In these cases, predictability made it easier to be
tactful while being hurtful. Mrs. Stevens, who told her husband that he conversed so loudly in public that it became rude and embarrassing, indicated that predictability made it easier to deliver the message. She said, "I don't really think I sat up there and said, 'Is this going to hurt his feelings?' because I've told him before that he's loud so I don't think it was anything new to him." Mrs. Stevens had been married to her husband for a long time: twenty years. Further, she had a history of delivering this same message to her husband. Delivering the message, therefore, was a predictable pattern. There were not many potential surprises or uncertainties. When asked if predictability made it easier to deliver the message, she said "Probably. I think so."

Mrs. Johnson, who told her husband he needed to get his anger under control before the birth of their first grandchild, was able to pick a time and place when her husband would be most receptive. She said:

Well, I had to wait for the right time so I didn't make him angry about it, so I picked a time when I knew that he wouldn't get angry and that he would be accepting of what I had to say. I brought it up when we were alone and when we were already talking about our new grandchild coming.

Like Mrs. Stevens, Mrs. Johnson and her husband had been married for a long time: thirty-two years. This probably made it easier to pick a time when she "knew that he wouldn't get angry."

Delivering her message when they were alone and already on the subject of their grandchild also seemed to be important factors.

Mrs. Underwood, who told her husband he was working too slowly on a home renovation project, also found that predictability made it easier for her to pick a time to deliver the message. She approached her husband at a time when he would be most receptive. She said, "I picked a
time when he was calm and teachable." When asked how she knew when this was possible, Mrs. Underwood said:

 When I could tell he felt more at ease, when he was more talkative, having a good time. Its not that he drives into the yard and you go out there and start talking about this problem you've been having all day. I picked a time when he was more malleable, when he wasn't under a lot pressure.

In this way, predictability made it easier for Mrs. Underwood to choose a time when her husband was "ready to receive a message," and less likely to react negatively.

The final two examples display instances where novelty factored into HBH messages. Miss Brewer and Miss White both talked about uncertainty in their relationships. Miss Brewer, whose message addressed the predictability of her boyfriend's laziness, said that novelty also played a role. She said she was surprised and caught off-guard when her boyfriend asked her to move in with him. She explained, “We had been together for a little under a year and I didn't think either of us were thinking much about the future at the time.” Miss White, whose message also addressed the predictability of her boyfriend's laziness, said novelty too was relevant because, "At that point it was probably about 3 months into it and, you know, it was that whole test period when you get to know somebody and see if it's actually worth your time." She was still discovering whether the predictability of her boyfriend's laziness would continue or if it was just a phase, or something that was correctable. In both examples the relationships were new and fresh and both participants were relatively young: Miss Brewer was seventeen and Miss White was twenty-five, possibly explaining why novelty was an important factor.

Thematically, predictability was talked about most by participants. HBH messages typically addressed predictable behaviors that were troubling and detrimental to relationships.
Some participants said predictability made it easier to plan and prepare for delivering messages. These participants had all been married for a significant amount of time and were more familiar with their partners. Two participants indicated that novelty was relevant to their messages. These participants addressed predictable behaviors with their messages, but both were young and in new relationships where a lot of uncertainty still existed.

**Message Delivery**

Each participant provided a written statement reconstructing the HBH message event and each participant also provided an interview that expounded upon that written statement. Written statements and interviews focused on details about message delivery. The following results are divided into FTA strategies, politeness techniques, and rituals of deference. First, FTA strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987) highlight whether messages are on or off record. An FTA done on record is direct and unambiguous while an FTA done off record is ambiguous and can claim multiple meanings. FTA strategies also focus on the use of redressive actions, which are actions used to limit the degree of face-threat. Second, politeness techniques (Brown & Levinson, 1987) focus on positive and negative politeness tactics used in message deliveries. Positive politeness techniques pay respect to a recipient's positive face (a person's desire to be liked) while negative politeness techniques pay respect to a recipient's negative face (a person's desire to be unimpeded). This section focuses on semantic content in messages (or the omission of certain content). Finally, rituals of deference (Goffman, 1956) focus on presentational and avoidance behaviors used in message deliveries. Presentational rituals are markers of intention in an interaction while avoidance rituals are actions that are refrained from. This section focuses on characteristics pertaining to verbal and nonverbal rituals of deference. Collectively, the themes of message delivery are presented below.
FTA Strategies. It was reported earlier that each participant described their message as more open than closed. Each message, therefore, can be described as being delivered on record. In other words, participants stated the honest and hurtful aspects of their messages directly. Participants also incorporated redressive actions into their messages. Each made an attempt to soften the hurt. First, to show that each message was on record the following table displays each message paraphrased in the participant's words.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>HBH Message</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Johnson</td>
<td>&quot;I told him his anger gets in the way&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Underwood</td>
<td>&quot;I advised him to farm out the work.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Brewer</td>
<td>&quot;I told him I could never move in with him.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Smith</td>
<td>&quot;I expressed that I would appreciate it if he would do a better job of introducing me and including me in conversation.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. David</td>
<td>&quot;I told my girlfriend that she lacked the requisite knowledge to maintain a conversation that was interesting and intellectually stimulating.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Stevens</td>
<td>&quot;I said something like, 'Gosh, you were really loud and you were kind of embarrassing [their son].'&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Brown</td>
<td>&quot;I told her I loved her but I felt like she had treated me like shit.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Chase</td>
<td>&quot;I told her I would never go on a vacation with them [girlfriend's family] again.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss White</td>
<td>&quot;I simply said that I was not used to being with a man who sleeps until 10:30 am and who really doesn't do anything outside of work and quite frankly, I didn't like it.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each of these messages is clear, direct, and unambiguous. There is no contention about what is meant.

Each participant also incorporated redressive actions into their message. This means they made attempts to soften the hurt through tact. For example, when Mrs. Johnson told her husband he needed to control his anger she said she told him "lovingly rather than threatening" and stressed she was "concerned and not angry." When Mrs. Underwood told her husband she preferred him to contract professional help to finish a home renovation project rather than doing
it himself, she said her approach was to "give advice but not boss around." After Miss Brewer realized she hurt her boyfriend's feelings by refusing his invitation to move in with him, she reframed her message to sound more "apologetic, a little bit more reasonable … a little bit more actual heartfelt emotion." When Miss Smith told her fiancé he was rude to her at a gathering of his work friends she said, "I think more or less how I approached it was more in a playful manner." When Mr. David told his girlfriend she did not satisfy him conversationally he said, "I tried to be tactful. I didn't just blurt it out." When Mrs. Stevens told her husband he was too loud she said, "I tried to soften it by telling him other people were trying to carry on their own conversations," which provided a practical reason for giving the message as opposed to something that might sound pedantic. When Mr. Brown told his wife she was unsupportive while he cared for his dying father he said, "I told her I loved her but…" After Mr. Chase realized he hurt his girlfriend's feelings by saying he would never go on another vacation with her family again he said, "I thought about it afterwards and brought it up again and tried to say things a little bit nicer and in a better way," therefore reframing his message much like Miss Brewer. Finally, When Miss White told her boyfriend he did not fit her idea of a "man" because he was lazy she said, "I was nice, I wasn't mean about it. I never directly said, 'You're lazy.' I would just give examples of things he was doing that I think showed signs of laziness." In each example, the participant shows an awareness of the potential hurt that could result from the message, and indicates intention to minimize the threat through the use of redressive actions. These actions are reported in more detail in the following sections: positive politeness techniques, negative politeness techniques, presentational rituals, and avoidance rituals.

**Positive Politeness Techniques.** This section reports the positive politeness techniques used by participants in HBH message deliveries. Positive politeness refers to redressive actions
that pay respect to a recipient's positive face, which means the recipient's desire to be liked and accepted. Positive politeness techniques communicate the message giver's intent to not be non-threatening. Positive politeness is also used to communicate that criticisms incorporated into messages do not imply the recipient is a bad person. The techniques used by participants included providing logical reasoning for the message, giving compliments, and affirming romantic attachment.

Logical reasoning was provided in some messages to show that the message was in the recipient's best interest and that the recipient would benefit from the message. Logical reasoning was also provided to show that the message did not intend to be hurtful and that the recipient was not a bad person. In the first three examples, participants used logical reasoning as a form of positive politeness. When Mrs. Johnson told her husband to get control of his anger, she conveyed that she was afraid his temper would prohibit them from seeing their grandchild by explaining that their son would be nervous about bringing the baby over and would not visit as often because of it. Therefore, she outlined a negative consequence that would impact her husband and explained that the purpose of her message was to avoid such a consequence. She communicated that she wanted him to improve so they could enjoy their grandchild together.

When Mrs. Underwood told her husband she preferred hiring professional laborers to finish their home renovation project instead of him, she explained that it was a good move financially and that it would allow him to spend time on other projects. She said:

Sometimes he felt like a failure because he wasn't doing it but I explained with figures and proof that it was a good move financially and timewise and explained that's why we save money for stuff, to make life better, and this would free him up to do the next project.
She communicated that the message did not intend to challenge or berate him, but that she was taking his interests into consideration. She wanted him to be less stressed so they could be happier together.

When Miss White told her boyfriend he was lazy and that a man should not be lazy she explained to him the consequences of his behavior. She said:

I kind of started off with saying, 'Why are you taking half a day's off work on Fridays?' Then that led into the fact that he really wanted to buy a snowmobile, or wants to buy a snowmobile, but by him taking a half a day of work off every week that's money that he's throwing away. I was just getting towards the fact that by being this way you just aren’t going to receive the things that you want.

She communicated that he could get what he wanted, in this case a snowmobile, if he applied himself more. Therefore, she showed that the message was in his best interest.

The next two examples show participants providing logical reasoning to communicate that the message does not intend to hurt the recipient's feelings and that the message does not mean the recipient is a bad person. When Miss Brewer realized she hurt her boyfriend's feelings by telling him she would not move in with him because he was messy and had no ambition, she quickly reframed her message to communicate that she did not mean to hurt his feelings and she shifted her reasoning from him being messy and apathetic to her circumstantially not being able to. She said:

I tried to emphasize the more important reasons why we couldn't move in together, mainly I was still in high school, I was seventeen at the time, and basically like the more important things besides that: money issues, work issues, my parents not allowing it issues.
Even though her initial message was hurtful, her second try was corrective and attempted to logically reframe the message so it was not as hurtful. It attempted to restore positive face on behalf of her boyfriend.

When Mr. David told his girlfriend she did not satisfy him conversationally, he communicated that that this did not mean he considered her to be a bad person. He said:

I wanted to communicate to her that it wasn't necessarily indicative of her being a bad person, or to say that she was less than, but just an observation. I just related to her that I have terribly high standards and beyond that, they are probably too high, and that leads to me being generally dissatisfied with almost anybody up to and including her.

He attempted to restore positive face on her behalf by deferring blame onto himself.

Giving compliments was another technique of positive politeness used by participants. The next three examples show participants giving compliments to pay respect to the recipient's positive face. Mrs. Johnson said, "I told him [her husband] he was – is – a really good person but his anger gets it the way." She added that the whole family thinks he is a good person. She said, "I told him we all know he is a good person." This communicated that despite his anger problem he was still liked and appreciated. When Mrs. Underwood told her husband she wanted professionals to finish their home renovation project instead of him because he was moving too slowly she made sure to communicate that her message was not a negative assessment of the quality of his work. She told him that he had "a lot of expertise and talent but because he was an extreme perfectionist he was slow." In this way she was able to emphasize some likable qualities of his. When Miss Brewer reframed the message to her boyfriend that she would not move in with him, she corrected herself by acknowledging some positive aspects of his life. She said:
He had gotten another promotion where he worked. He was the manager and I guess it was more of a raise than a promotion, but he was getting a little bit more responsibility. Also, he was in a martial art and he had been taking these classes and advanced to some level or something within that.

She added, "I wanted to go back to saying I truly was sorry for what I said. I wanted to give him worth, like 'you've done stuff so it's not really true what I said.'" It seems that Miss Brewer's corrective message went as far as to contradict her initial message in order to restore positive face on behalf of her boyfriend.

Finally, emphasizing romantic attachment was also a form of positive politeness used by participants. Two participants communicated affection to increase romantic intimacy. Miss White, for example, said "I even used the word 'sweetheart,' you know?" when telling her boyfriend he was lazy and not much of a "man" because of it. "Sweetheart" is a token of intimacy that can communicate fond appreciation. When Mr. Brown told his wife, "You treated me like shit," he prefaced the message with, "I love you but…" By doing this he was able to give his message from a romantic standpoint. Emphasizing romantic attachment frames the interaction as intimate and acknowledges the recipient as an appreciated partner even if there is a matter of disagreement.

Collectively, these examples show themes that emerged regarding the usage of positive politeness in HBH message deliveries. Providing logical reasoning, giving compliments, and emphasizing romantic attachment were all techniques used by participants as forms of positive politeness. Logical reasoning was used to show that messages were given to benefit the recipient and to that messages did not intend to cause hurt. Compliments were used to highlight positive and likable aspects of the recipient in order to communicate appreciation. Emphasizing romantic
attachment communicated that messages were given from a romantic and intimate perspective, appealing to the recipient's desire to be liked and included.

**Negative Politeness Techniques.** This section focuses on the negative politeness techniques used in HBH message deliveries. Negative politeness refers to redressive actions that pay respect to a recipient's negative face, which means the recipient's desire to be unimpeded. Negative politeness techniques, therefore, are avoidance based and non-restricting. Examples of negative politeness are any actions that refrain from violating a recipient's personal space, desired actions, or sense of privacy (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The avoidance of introducing and dwelling on sensitive subject matters in conversation is also listed by Brown and Levinson (1987) as a form of negative politeness. In this study, two themes of negative politeness emerged: privacy and censoring. Some participants delivered messages in environments that were private and non-restricting where recipients were not put on display (i.e., not put on display in front of children or other third parties where intimate couple-related problems are made public) and not pressured to respond and could walk away willfully. Some participants also spoke about avoiding insults and making threats.

The first three examples show the inclination for participants to give messages in private and non-restricting settings. The messages all took place at home. Presumably, home is a place where recipients do not feel pressured to respond and can easily remove themselves from the situation by walking into another room or by leaving. Also, by delivering HBH messages in a private setting away from children or other third parties, message givers avoided turning couple-related conversations into public events. Mrs. Underwood was at home when she first talked to her husband about their renovation project; their children were away. She said:
I think initially when you bring up a message like 'you're slow and we need to pay somebody to do this' or whatever, I don’t think I would want to have – especially if it’s a spouse or somebody like that – I wouldn't want to have your kids around, although I think it's cool that kids are not kept in the dark about everything, I think that sometimes talking to the person without a lot of company around [is important].

However, Mrs. Underwood brought up an exception. She said, "Sometimes having a third voice is helpful." In her case, through a series of conversations her father-in-law was brought into the discussion and he took her side on the matter. His endorsement helped to eventually convince her husband to contract professional labor. The first time the topic was broached, however, it was done in private.

Mrs. Stevens also spoke about the importance of being at home and removed from children when giving her message. She was at home when she talked to her husband about his excessive loudness during their son's curling practice. When asked how she softened the blow she said, "I think by not saying something at the curling club and waiting until we got home, and you know, [their son] wasn't around either, it was just the two of us." She waited for an appropriate time when they were in the right place and alone. Mr. David was in the bedroom when he talked to his girlfriend about his dissatisfaction with her conversational abilities. However, there was some distance between the two. He said, "She was sitting up in the bed and I was pacing on the floor." The distance quite literally gave space to the recipient, who could have opted to walk away.

Two participants gave their messages in the car. The car is a a private setting but is a confining environment that is spatially restrictive, so in some respects delivering a message in the car can have the effect of cornering the recipient. Mrs. Johnson was riding in the car with her
husband when they talked about his anger problem. She said, "We were actually in a car, riding in a car." Mr. Chase was also in a car when he told his girlfriend he would never go on another vacation with her family again. He said, "It was on the way home from the vacation. We got our flight in and then we drove back home and we talked about it." Mr. Chase had been brooding about this during the vacation but waited until he was alone with his girlfriend to deliver the message. Though the car is a confining setting, at the very least the recipient's sense of privacy is not violated.

Some participants used censoring as a form of negative politeness. The next four examples show how participants omitted certain content from their messages to avoid exacerbating the situation. Mr. Chase said he avoided using curse words. "I never do that," he said. Curse words are likely to induce defensive behavior and lead to an argument. Miss White wanted to communicate to her boyfriend that he was lazy but did not want to say the word 'lazy.' She said, "I never directly said, 'You're lazy.' I would just give examples of things he was doing that showed laziness." Lazy can sound like a finger-pointing word and is also likely to induce defensive behavior and a negative reaction. Instead, by giving examples of his laziness she was able to build a convincing case and provide reasoning for giving the message. Mrs. Underwood spoke about not wanting to "boss" her husband when she told him they should hire outside help to finish the home renovation project. Instead, she wanted to "advise" him. Advising is a constructive way to make a suggestion while bossing is more like giving orders. By advising, Mrs. Underwood brought her husband into the conversation. Finally, Mrs. Johnson did not want to threaten her husband when they talked about his anger problem. She said, "I just didn't want to say anything threatening like 'If you don't I'm going leave you,' or something like that." She did not want to issue an ultimatum that would make the message sound menacing. In
these examples, censoring highly charged language and omitting threats was a form of negative politeness used by participants to give recipients more room to respond. If a recipient is cursed at, berated, or threatened he/she is more likely to react defensively instead of constructively.

Collectively, the above themes show that participants used negative politeness to avoid making the situation worse. The techniques used included choosing an appropriate time when the message could be delivered in a private and non-restricting setting and censoring highly charged language and statements. Delivering messages in private avoided restricting recipients by putting them on display and pressuring a response. Censoring highly charged language avoided exacerbating episodes because explosive language is likely to lead to defensive behavior. Positive and negative politeness are forms of deference that can be categorized respectively as presentational and avoidance rituals. In the following sections (presentational rituals and avoidance rituals), positive and negative politeness techniques are reported upon further in terms of verbal and nonverbal rituals of deference.

**Presentational Rituals.** This section reports the presentational rituals used in HBH message deliveries. A presentational ritual indicates intention in an interaction. Participants described verbal behavior during HBH message deliveries as friendly, conversational, and even-keeled. Participants took a gentle approach toward the delicate task. Participants described nonverbal behavior in the same way. They kept and maintained eye contact if they could.

Miss Smith said her verbal approach was "playful" and "more conversational" when she told her boyfriend he was rude to her when they hung out with his work friends. Mrs. Johnson, too, said she put her message "in a conversation matter-of-factly" when she talked to her husband about his temper. She also said she was "even and unexcited." Miss White said her tone was "very calm, just a normal conversation," when she confronted her boyfriend about his lazy
habits. Miss Brewer described her vocal tone as "a little apologetic … a little more heartfelt." when she told her boyfriend she did not want to move in with him. These responses indicate that participants assumed a peaceful and non-threatening demeanor during their episodes perhaps in effort to establish connection and trust.

Some participants made use of eye contact. The next four examples show participant's inclination to use eye contact when giving their messages. When Mr. Brown told his wife she was unsupportive during his father's death he said, "I was faced away from her during the message, but eye contact when I was listing the different things [in support of the message]." Miss Smith said, "I kept eye contact." When Mr. David expressed dissatisfaction with his girlfriend's conversational ability he said, "I made eye contact." Finally, when Mrs. Underwood was asked if she made eye contact she nodded and said, "I think that part is important." Eye contact, like a conversational verbal tone, can make a sincere connection with the recipient and establish trust, indicating positive intentions in the interaction.

Thematically, participants were friendly, conversational, and even-keeled in terms of verbal tone. Nonverbally, participants used eye contact if they could. Some participants were positioned so that nonverbal communication was hindered. Mrs. Johnson and Mr. Chase, for example, were in cars seated forward and not in direct eyesight of their message recipients. Most other participants talked about nonverbal behavior in terms of what they avoided. This is covered in the following section.

Avoidance Rituals. This section reports the avoidance rituals used in HBH message deliveries. Avoidance rituals, like forms of negative politeness, are characterized by what is not to be done in an interaction. Participants reported the avoidance of confrontation through the use
of non-threatening gestures. Four participants spoke about using limited nonverbal communication during message deliveries.

Mrs. Johnson was in a car when talking to her husband about his temper and, therefore, was hindered in nonverbal communication but said, "I tried to remain calm and use quiet gestures and not use my hands a lot." She did not want to do something sudden or quick which might appear threatening. Mr. Chase was also in a car when he talked to his girlfriend about their experience on vacation. He said nonverbally he did not have any options. "Well, since we were driving I still had my hands on the wheel," he said. Mr. David said, "I'm not really a gesture type person. My hands were probably at my sides or folded," when he told his girlfriend she was not a good conversationalist. Mr. Brown was faced away from his wife when he said, "You treated me like shit," and then turned to face her when he gave evidence in support of his message.

Participants who spoke about nonverbal avoidance rituals talked about using non-threatening and quiet gestures. Most participants, however, had a hard time remembering their nonverbal behavior during message episodes and could not speak with certainty on the subject. Participants tended to be more aware of the semantic content of their messages and presentational behaviors like eye contact.

Summary

The results presented in this chapter focus on dialectic contradiction in romantic relationships pertaining to HBH message experience, and participant’s use of strategies, techniques and rituals in HBH message delivery. Results regarding dialectic contradiction show that HBH messages are events of disclosure where openness is emphasized over closedness. HBH messages are occasions for openness. In reference to the other dialectics, autonomy seems
to make saying something hurtful easier. Some participants, however, delivered messages to protect relational connection. Predictability seemed to create more occasions for HBH messages, and predictability also made it easier for some participants to plan for saying something hurtful to their partners. There was not sufficient evidence to support the relevance of other dialectic contradictions outside the primary three.

Results regarding message delivery show that participants delivered HBH messages *on record* using combinations of positive and negative politeness and rituals of deference. Participant’s tended to emphasize that they did not intend to hurt the other. Through logical reasoning, the use of compliments, and emphasizing romantic attachment, participants reminded the recipient that their character in full was not being attacked. Participants refrained from using strong or sensitive words and refrained from delivering messages in non-private at restricting settings. Participants also used conversational and non-threatening tones as well as quiet gestures to display a peaceful demeanor.

The outcomes of each message are presented in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>HBH Message</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Johnson</td>
<td>&quot;I told him his anger gets in the way&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;He accepted it. He was more surprised than anything.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Underwood</td>
<td>&quot;I advised him to farm out the work.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;He was ok with it and not threatened. I heard him later bragging to someone about the whole thing.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Brewer</td>
<td>&quot;I told him I could never move in with him.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;We ended up breaking up a couple months later.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Smith</td>
<td>&quot;I expressed that I would appreciate it if he would do a better job of introducing me and including me in conversation.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Message received well. Everything was cool.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. David</td>
<td>&quot;I told my girlfriend that she lacked the requisite knowledge to maintain a conversation that was interesting and intellectually stimulating.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;She cried, felt like I was attacking her character.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Stevens</td>
<td>&quot;I said something like, 'Gosh, you were really loud and you were kind of embarrassing [their son].'&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Will it make any difference? Probably not.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Brown</td>
<td>&quot;I told her I loved her but I felt like she had treated me like shit.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I'll tell you that ever since I said that, it's been a lot better.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Chase</td>
<td>&quot;I told her I would never go on a vacation with them [girlfriend's family] again.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I brought it up again because there were a lot of things I wanted to touch over. She took it better.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss White</td>
<td>&quot;I simply said that I was not used to being with a man who sleeps until 10:30 am and who really doesn't do anything outside of work.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;For about a week after that he was doing good, but then, now, he's back to normal.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

The goal of this chapter is to analyze the results reported above and to begin offering additional answers to the research questions. The research questions, again, were (1) How are openness-closedness, autonomy-connection, and predictability-novelty relevant to HBH message experiences? (2) Which strategies of politeness and deference emerge as common themes in message delivery? And (3) how do strategies of message delivery work to manage dialectic contradiction? The first research question addresses dialectic contradiction, which is the first section in this chapter. This section is broken down into sub-sections of openness-closedness, autonomy-connection, and predictability-novelty. Research question two addresses message delivery, which is discussed in the second section. This section is broken down into the sub-sections FTA strategies on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, presentational rituals, and avoidance rituals. Research question three addresses dialectic contradiction and message delivery and discussed throughout the sub-sections of message delivery.

Dialectic Contradiction

**Openness-Closedness.** Openness is essential for HBH messages. HBH messages are acts of disclosure where hurt is communicated honestly and by that account, openly. HBH messages are events of openness. They are also, by definition, messages that deal with undesirable subject matters. They confront issues that mark conflicts of interest between message givers and recipients and they broach topics that threaten to violate expectations of emotional support between romantic partners, so openness is not only requisite in HBH messages but it is also a bold and significant event. In this study, HBH messages occurred when openness/honesty about a given topic was more important than causing hurt. From the perspective of message givers, when the need for openness was greater than the need to prevent
hurt, hurt was justified and necessary. Openness/honesty was more important that causing hurt (1) when a change was desired and (2) to satisfy the need to vent.

In the first situation, change was desired when a perceived flaw in the recipient, in turn, caused a problem in the relationship. Always, the recipient's flaws were behavioral (e.g., he was rude, he had a bad temper, he was lazy, he was messy, he was he was too loud, he was too slow, she was unsupportive, he was aimless), and always these behaviors were regarded by the message givers as destructive, unsupportive, or annoying. For the message givers, these behaviors threatened the quality of each relationship. For example, one participant worried about her husband's temper as the two were becoming grandparents. She worried his temper would stand in the way of seeing their grandchild, because she knew her son was also uncomfortable with his father's temper. So not only was her husband's temper straining the relationship, it was also causing a rift in the family, and her message was an effort to preserve the family. She asked him to exercise more self control and explained it would be a change for the good, so they could enjoy their grandchild together. Another participant felt that her fiancé inadequately introduced her to his work friends at a social event and then failed to include her in the conversation. She did not want this kind of behavior to be repeated so she confronted him and asked that he try harder to include her next time. She said, "It's just something that I wanted to have changed." According to Brown and Levinson (1987), a person may engage in an FTA when face-threat is not as important as the message itself. In HBH messages, participants were open and hurtful to their partners because the changes desired were more important than initial hurt caused by the messages.

When a change was desired it seemed to always be an attempt by the message giver to make the partner more compatible. In somewhat more selfish words, change on behalf of the
recipient was desired to fit the needs of the message giver. Examples showed participants giving messages to make partners better behaved, more responsible, and more supportive because deficiencies in these areas threatened the quality of the relationships. In these examples participants maintained that their objectives were to improve their relationships, though it is easy to think of an example where someone is open with a partner about wanting change and that change is a break-up, a separation, or a divorce, therefore, a change that dissolves the relationship. Compatibility, then, can sometimes mean absence from the other. Nonetheless, openness was used to identify a problem and direct change.

The second point offers another use of openness in HBH messages: openness/honesty was more important than causing hurt to satisfy the need to vent. Some participants gave messages to induce change and to satisfy the need to vent. One participant said she tried not to bottle things up because she had a problem with that in the past. Getting her message out in a timely and sensible way was important for her. Another participant said her message was a "wake-up call" to her boyfriend that had been brewing in her subconscious for a while. She said it was just waiting for an opportunity and time to come out.

Other participants, however, vented for the mere sake of venting. What is interesting is that they vented while disbelieving change was even possible. Two participants said they delivered messages this way, having no confidence in the recipient's ability to change. These participants vented as if performing preventative maintenance, something that needed to be done to keep the system running smoothly. These two, by the way, carried their messages out in cordial manners. They were not aggressive. The first said, "I definitely didn't think that she was going to change her ways or really has the ability to, because I don't think it's under her control." He added, "I tried to be tactful," when he gave the message, "I didn't just blurt it out." Speaking
aloud, though, made him "feel better," he said. The other participant said she had given her husband the same message over and over again: he's too loud. (This brings up the important point that some HBH message experiences are not isolated events but are sagas that can span multiple interactions, where the messages get framed and reframed and corrected with the passing of time, as a form of interactional dialectics (Rawlins, 1992). This point is given more consideration in the latter portion of this chapter.) For Mrs. Stevens, telling him once more, she said, was probably not going to make any difference, but because he was persistently annoying, she was constantly driven to the point of needing to say something. Venting for the sake of venting seemed to offer these participants a sense of respite. Even though inducing change was unlikely, they could at least take what was bothering them and get it off their chest. Venting just to vent seemed to be an alternative to bottling up tension and harboring secret resentment.

Other participants vented in spontaneous outbursts. Their messages were explosions spurred by anger and frustration. These examples of venting stand apart from the abovementioned examples in that they were not done cordially. They were more aggressive in nature. They were verbal attacks. Still, though, when participants spontaneously unleashed their messages it marked occasions when openness/honesty was emphasized over hurt. One participant said "I wasn't very careful or cautious about the things I said. It was more just offensive to her." Another participant said "I rarely use a swear word with my wife, so I think it came out spontaneously, but I needed, I needed it to be a strongly worded message." In both examples, the participants had been brooding for a long time and were quite pent-up. In the former example, the participant had been on vacation with his girlfriend and her family for a week and he felt as if her parents outwardly disapproved of him and let him know, in not too
subtle ways, that he was not right for their daughter, and this was just something they always did anyways but he did not have the space or privacy to complain about it until the vacation was over and he was finally alone, one-on-one, with his girlfriend. When he told her that he had a bad time on vacation, that he did not like her parents and did not want to spend time like that with them again, the message was understandably on-edge, and by his account, "hurtful." It was an outburst. Similarly, another participant had been enduring his father's slow death and what he perceived to be a lack of support from his wife ("grief" he called it, there were hundreds of episodes of her giving him "grief") for "over several months if not a whole year," before he finally said something, telling her she treated him like "shit." Both participants revisited their messages the following day and reframed them in a more positive light.

Another participant who vented spontaneously did so in retaliation. Her message began cordially as a suggestion for change but quickly turned into an argument. She told her boyfriend she thought he was lazy (but not using the word "lazy") and he responded by challenging her on her shortcomings. She said:

I had been wanting to talk to him about this for a while, and, um, before that he has, he'd been, yelling at me for things that I was doing wrong, and so finally I kind of just was fed up and it was, it was planned, but not at that moment so it was kind of spontaneous, and if well if you don’t like this and this and this about me, well I'm going to let you know what I don't like about you – that's kind of how it came up.

Her message, therefore, was in response to being attacked and was a defense mechanism. She was very clear about her intentions. If he was going to talk about things he did not like about her, then she would return the favor and share what she did not like about him. This is a textbook example of payback. In that moment, she wanted to hurt his feelings.
Openness, again, was a crucial part of each HBH message experience. In fact, openness was the most important part of each message. This is true because HBH messages occurred when openness/honesty became more important than hurt. Participants could rationalize causing hurt to their romantic partner if it improved the relationship, if it was just something they needed to say, or if it was just something the recipient needed to hear. Basically, participants used openness to cause some kind of change and/or vent.

**Autonomy-Connection.** To address the autonomy-connection contradiction, autonomy was spoken about most by participants. Participants were far more likely to describe their relationships as autonomous, and it seemed autonomy was relevant to more HBH message experiences than connection. This may be due to the fact that autonomous people are more independent and independent people and are more secure and secure people are, sometimes, more outspoken because they have less to lose (in their eyes). This is a very broad generalization, but participants describing their relationships as autonomous in this study seemed more-at-ease when being hurtful, and seemed happy to talk about it. Some participants, though, did give open and hurtful messages to increase connection in their relationships, and they were very forthright with their stories which were actually stories of success. What is most interesting about these participants is that they showed how hurt is sometimes necessary for improvement and how romantic attachment can actually increase via some forms of hurt.

First, the proclivity for people who are autonomous/independent to be more outspoken makes sense becomes autonomy is not threatened by unsupportive behavior. This claim, of course, is reliant on if the independent person actually likes and desires autonomy (some people are independent because they have no choice). For the independent person (i.e. the independent person who likes being independent), the potential consequences of being hurtful to a romantic
partner (including alienation, creating hostility, causing a rift, etc.) do not impinge on the condition of autonomy. The independent person derives most of his/her security and support from within. At least that is the independent person's outward image. With this logic, notwithstanding the potential for tremendous and subtle variances across the board in individual personality, people describing their relationships at autonomous might be more inclined to engage in FTAs such as HBH messages, losing connection is not as important as maintaining autonomy.

Regardless of whether this is actually true, this study did tend to yield participants who described their relationships as autonomous, and some of these participants were adamant (some even outspoken) about establishing and guarding their independence. One participant was adamant about being very independent and not needing a man or depending on one. Another participant said:

I think we're pretty independent, we kind of do our own things, certainly each of us can get along without the other for a while if we have to, um we like being with each other, but no, I think of other couple that I know who are very dependent on one another and have a hard time without the other being around.

For these two participants, and seven others, although they expressed happiness with being in a relationship, they also preserved parts of their independence, and indicated in some cases that they would be perfectly fine on their own. The point is that autonomy is not threatened by being hurtful.

The obvious contradiction is that some of these participants, despite speaking about independence, seemed to give messages to increase connection. In this study, each message (in some way) was to make the relationship better (however selfish the intentions of the message
giver may have been). This is to say that autonomy-connection cannot be an either/or category. For example, one participant resisted increasing connection by choosing not to move in with her boyfriend but did not want to end the relationship. Some connection was still desired. Two participants indicated they wanted their partners to be more compatible, but admitted they knew this was not possible. Still, they gave their messages and still they remained with their partners. So even though autonomy is not threatened by being hurtful, vulnerabilities still exist because people are not wholly autonomous or wholly connected. Even a person who is largely independent must have a small desire for connection.

While most people spoke more openly about autonomy, a much smaller sample of participants talked about the relevance of connection in their HBH message experiences. A few participants described their relationships as very connected and defined the objective of their messages as to increase romantic attachment. These participants were female and in longstanding marriages of 15 + years. In both cases, they needed to point out a flaw in their husbands that limited the relationship in some way. Mrs. Johnson's message has been documented extensively to this point: her husband's temper stood in the way of quality family time with new grandchild. Another participant had to tell her husband he was working too slowly while renovating their house, which restricted the amount of quality time they could spend together. In both cases, therefore, they had to say something hurtful to their husbands in order to spend more -and better quality time with them. In these circumstances the function of hurt is similar to how tough love operates between a mother and child, where the message giver is willing to deny the recipient something it desires for the greater consequence of making the recipient a better person. The difference is that a mother intends to help the child become

...
independent and survive on its own. For participants in this study, the idea was to bring the other person closer.

In summary, the main themes regarding autonomy-connection were that most participants described their relationships as autonomous, and only a couple described their relationships as connected. It is suggested that autonomous people are more likely to engage in FTAs because autonomy is not threatened by being hurtful. However, a person in a relationship cannot be completely autonomous or completely connected. It is more true to say a person desires some degree of both. In this study, participants tended to speak more about autonomy.

Predictability-Novelty. The final contradiction to be analyzed is predictability-novelty. There were three ways in which predictability-novelty was relevant to HBH message experiences. The first theme was relevant to message content: (1) HBH messages addressed undesirable behaviors about partners that were established and predictable. The second and third themes were relevant to message context: (2) predictability made it easier plan and prepare accordingly for messages, and (3) aspects of novelty were important in new relationships. Much like autonomy-connection, predictability-novelty is not an either/or category. Most relationships possess aspects of both. Recall Mrs. Steven's statement that though her marriage is predictable "it's not the drudgery of the same old thing every single day either." Predictability and novelty flux in and out. Not to mention, predictability is not synonymous with certainty. Participants with the most relationship experience with the same partner reported more predictability than participants who spoke about experiences involving new partners.

The first theme makes the point that message content tended to address undesirable behaviors about partners that were predictable. Nearly every message addressed a problem in the relationship that was recurring. For example, one participant told her husband he is too loud.
She said "I've told him before that he's loud." It was an ongoing topic. Another participant told her boyfriend he was lazy. She said, "He keeps taking half days off of work every Friday." In both examples, and several others, attention is brought to a repetitive occurrence and marked as a problem. If the message addressed a newly introduced problem, its purpose was to prevent future violations. For example, one participant told her fiancé he was rude to her at a gathering with his work friends. She said, "It's just something that I wanted to have changed." She was afraid he would become a repeat offender. She acted to prevent the problem from recurring.

The second theme is more relevant to message context. It states that predictability made it easier for participants to plan and prepare for their messages. These participants were able to choose appropriate times to deliver their messages when the recipients were most likely to be receptive, and reported giving satisfactory messages, where the messages were received quite well and positive change ensued. The common thread in both experiences was finding a time when the recipient was alone and known to be relaxed and calm. One participant said she knew the time was right when her husband appeared more at "ease" and was maybe "talkative" and having a "good time." These cues told her he was willing to "receive a message." Also, she said it was important to not have "company" around. She gave an example of what she did not want to do: "It's not that he drives into the yard and you go out there and start talking about this problem you've been having all day. I picked a time when he was more malleable, when he wasn't under a lot pressure." She was happy with the results of her message. She reported that he was, as predicted, more agreeable and open to suggestion. Another participant had a very similar experience. She said, "I had to wait for the right time so I didn't make him angry about it." This was important because her message addressed his short temper. She added, "I picked a time when I knew that he wouldn't get angry." She waited for a time when he was "calm," she
said, and when they "were alone." The result was good: he took it very well, she reported and positive change followed. It might be important to note that both these participants were female and in long standing marriages. This makes sense because more experience with a person makes it is easier to predict their behavior. Patience helps too.

The third theme of predictability-novelty is also relevant to message context. This theme states that novelty was important in some respects to new relationships. This theme applied to two participants who addressed something predictable and undesirable about their partners (Miss White told her boyfriend he was lazy and Miss Brewer told hers he was messy and aimless), but also expressed that their relationships were novel because both were in their early stages. Miss White said her message was given during that "test period when you get to know somebody and see if it's actually worth your time." Therefore, the future of the relationship was very much at stake. Miss Brewer said of her relationship, "We were not thinking much about the future." For these participants, novelty was the context. This put a lot of pressure on their HBH message events (where there is all-ready built-in pressure due to the nature of HBH messages). The future of these relationships may have depended on the message event outcomes, on whether those predictable behaviors addressed in the messages could be changed or not. In new relationships, the boundaries of predictability and novelty are still being explored.

In summary, predictability-novelty yielded three themes: (1) HBH messages addressed undesirable behaviors about partners that were predictable, (2) predictability made it easier for participants to plan and prepare for messages, and (3) message context varied from message content when in new novel relationships messages were given that addressed predictable patterns. Theme (1) was relevant to message content. The content of nearly every message addressed a partner's behavior that was problematic and predictable. Themes (2) and (3) were
relevant to message context. Some participants found that a predictable context allowed them to put together a game plan for approaching their messages. This proved to be a successful strategy. Other participants in new relationships reported a degree of novelty in their relationships despite delivering messages that addressed predictable behavior. In these relationships and messages, the boundaries of predictability and novelty were still being explored.

Message Delivery

FTA Strategies On Record. Each HBH message was delivered on record. By definition, messages delivered on record are given clearly and unambiguously (Brown & Levinson, 1987). There can be no dispute about what is meant by a message delivered on record. It is direct and up-front. This is to say that each HBH message disclosed information instead of withholding it, that each message was more open than closed, which is a point that has been made already. In fact, it was explained earlier that HBH messages, required by definition to be honest, were events of openness. An HBH message must be honest and, therefore, open and on record. It was reported that HBH messages were moments when openness/honesty was more important than causing hurt to (1) induce change and (2) to vent. Put another way, messages were on record to suggest change and to blow off steam.

Can messages be classified in other ways? It seems they can be. Messages can be categorized by which type of hurtful message speech act (Vangelisti, 1994) was being put on record. Recall that Vangelistis (1994) put together a list of common speech acts that were reported as hurtful in interpersonal situations (Appendix A). The list includes such things as evaluations, threats, assessments, etc. Essentially, it is a consolidated list of FTAs. So, when participants delivered messages to (1) induce change, what types of hurtful message speech acts
were employed? Likewise, when participants delivered messages (2) to vent, what types of HMSAs were employed? What was it exactly about these messages that made them hurtful?

The participants who delivered messages to induce change seemed to be using two types of HMSAs: expressing desire or preference and giving advice. These two go hand-in-hand. Participants began messages by identifying a problem and expressing a desire or preference for a change. Then participants suggested a course of action for change. For example, one participant told her husband that he had a problem with his temper. She expressed a desire for it to be changed, and thusly suggested that he do a better job of controlling it. It is important here to make a distinction between giving advice (suggesting a course of action) and another HMSA, giving a directive (giving orders, sets of directions, or commands). This distinction is important because participants gave advice but did not give directives. In other words, they made suggestions for changes by giving generic pieces of advice (like *you need to control your temper*) but they did not give orders or make commands (i.e., Mrs. Johnson did not give her husband instructions on how to control his temper like suggesting therapy or anger management classes). Other participants' examples show similar results: two participants told their boyfriends they were lazy and advised them not to be, but did not give specific orders. Another participant (Mrs. Underwood) told her husband he was working on a home project too slowly and suggested that they hire outside help. She did not, though, give orders or a set of directives. Participants who expressed desire for change and made suggestions for change seemed to stop short of giving directives.

The participants who gave messages to vent (those who vented just to vent: Mr. David and Mrs. Stevens) were not exactly giving advice because they acknowledged that change was not possible. Both indicated their messages had no chance of inducing change. You could say
these participants were expressing desires or preferences for change but probably more to the point, they were making evaluations. This means they were making statements about the value, worth, and quality of their partners. For example, Mr. David told his girlfriend she was not good at making intelligent conversation. Mrs. Stevens told her husband he was loud. These statements did, in some way, imply desire or preferences, and they could have potentially induced change, but they were evaluative statements more than anything. Classifying these as evaluations better describes the intention of the message givers.

There is yet another way to describe how HBH messages were put on record. This point addresses the fact that some message experiences were not isolated events. Some message experiences spanned several conversations and had been, therefore, on record for quite some time. Many participants talked about their messages as if they were a string of multiple interactions spread out through days, months, and even years (depending on when you are reading this, some experiences could be still ongoing). In a way, this is like Rawlins (1992) concept of interactional dialectics, which addresses dialectic contradiction as a result of the passing of time. The typical evolitional progression of message experiences were similar among participants. When the topic of the message was first broached it was largely preventative, identifying the problem and trying to stop it from happening again. Inevitably, the messages did not go according to plan: participants did a good job of identifying the problem but were not so effective at stopping it from happening again. More conversations were then needed to reframe the message in a positive way. Sometimes it was just one more conversation: Mr. Chase and Miss Brewer realized right away their messages had been harsher than they needed to be. They quickly reframed their messages in the form of apologies. Mr. Chase said, "We actually had a conversation about it the next day. I thought about it afterwards and brought it up again and tried
to say things a little bit nicer and in a better way." Miss Brewer said after her first message, "I wanted to go back so saying that I truly was sorry for what I said, kind of saying, 'no look, this is…, I wanted to give him worth.'" Mr. Chase and Miss Brewer were relatively young and in dating relationships. Participants who were in long standing marriages talked about message experiences that had been ongoing for longer periods of time. Mrs. Underwood and Mrs. Stevens, for example, gave messages that were drawn out over several conversations. Mrs. Underwood said, "It was something that came up because the project was taking so long. I brought it up a few times." Mrs. Stevens said:

I've told him before that he's loud. Sometimes when he's talking to his Mom on the phone, he's in the bedroom talking and I'm in the living room and I can hear the whole conversation, so I don't think it was anything new to him.

The point is that messages can exist and change over a span of time. If a message is too harsh and needs to be toned down, or if it is not stated clearly enough or is not put the right way and needs to be adjusted, the message can be reframed and changed. The bottom line is HBH messages from these participants do strive to be open and on record about something.

Brown and Levinson (1987) outline further distinctions for messages that are on record. If a message is on record it can be classified as being delivered with redress or without redress. Redress means to give face, or to respect face. Actions performed with redress are done to limit face damage by indicating that any threat to face is unintended or not desired (1987). Each participant spoke about using redress in their messages. They said things like "I tried to be tactful," "I softened the blow," "I wanted to give him worth," "I told her I loved her," and so on. Each participant was aware they were being hurtful and did things to minimize the hurt. (Note: participants used redress at least during some points of their message experiences. Recall some
participants began their messages indignantly and then used redress, and one participant began her message cordially but then became indignant.)

The third research questions asked, "How did techniques of message delivery work to manage dialectic contradiction?" Participants used redress to soften hurtful aspects of openness. Participants minimized face-threat by emphasizing connection and by implementing favorable strategies in accordance with predictability. Brown and Levinson (1987) categorize redressive actions into two categories of politeness: positive and negative. Brown and Levinson's (1987) concept of politeness is very similar to Goffman's (1956) concept of deference, where he distinguishes between presentational and avoidance rituals. The specific techniques of redress used to soften openness, emphasize connection, and take advantage of predictability are discussed in terms of politeness and deference in the following sections.

**Positive Politeness.** According to Brown and Levinson (1987), if an FTA is done on record using redress, the redressive actions used can be described as forms of positive or negative politeness. Positive politeness is discussed first. Positive politeness refers to actions which pay respect to a recipient's positive face (his/her desire to be liked and accepted). Participants used positive politeness to soften openness, emphasize connection, and take advantage of predictability. Specifically, participants implemented positive politeness in HBH messages by providing logical reasoning, giving compliments, and affirming romantic attachment.

Logical reasoning is considered a form of positive politeness because it was used to communicate to message recipients that messages were given to benefit the recipients. In other words, logical reasoning was used to say *I know this sounds hurtful, but if you think about it this way... it is ultimately in your best interest.* For example, Mrs. Johnson explained to her husband
that if he could control of his temper they would be able to spend quality together as a family again, without the worry of angry outbursts. She explained that the family supported him, but they were concerned. By doing this she was able to criticize him and at the same time communicate appreciation. Similarly, Mrs. Underwood had to tell her husband he was moving too slowly on a home renovation project and that she wanted to hire professionals to finish the job. Her strategy was to explain that it would not cost very much compared to what they had saved and that it would free up his schedule so they could spend more time together and he could start another project. Again, she was able to criticize him and also communicate appreciation.

In these examples, logical reasoning softened hurtful aspects of openness by communicating appreciation and paying respect to the recipient's positive face. Mrs. Underwood also indicated that using logical reasoning was her way of taking advantage of predictability. She knew the best way to reach him was through "figures and proof." She said, "I often had to explain with figures and proof that it was a good move financially or timewise.” She added, “This got through to him.” From experience, she could predict what techniques would be most effective.

Giving compliments was also done to communicate appreciation to recipients and thusly soften hurtful aspects of openness. Giving a compliment is an easy way to pay respect to a person's positive face. If it is genuine, a compliment communicates appreciation immediately. Surprisingly, only a few participants spoke about incorporating compliments into their HBH messages. Mrs. Johnson said, "I told [my husband] we all know he is a good person." Mrs. Underwood said, "I told [my husband] he had a lot of expertise and talent but because he was an extreme perfectionist he was slow." Finally, Miss Brewer, despite telling her boyfriend she would not move in with him because he was messy and aimless, complimented him on his recent pay raise at work and his advancement in the martial arts class he was taking. She gave him
these compliments, she said, "to give him worth." In these examples, compliments were used to soften hurtful aspects of openness.

The last form of positive politeness used by participants was affirming romantic attachment. In these examples, connection is emphasized to communicate appreciation for the recipient. Emphasizing connection affirms to the recipient that he/she is wanted in the relationship. Only two participants spoke about emphasizing connection in their HBH messages. It is interesting, though, that both these participants described their relationships as largely autonomous. Nevertheless, they specifically marked romantic connection in their messages. Miss White said, "I even used the word 'sweetheart,' you know?" when telling her boyfriend he was lazy. Mr. Brown prefaced his message ("You treated me like shit") by saying "I love you," first. In fact, he said, "I love you but…" By emphasizing romantic connection message givers could criticize recipients while maintaining the framework of a couple, of a partnership. This echoes a statement written by Brown and Levinson (1987): "A criticism, with the assertion of mutual friendship, may lose its sting" (p. 72). In this way, positive politeness by emphasizing connection can reduce the amount of face-threat in a message.

**Negative Politeness.** Negative politeness refers to actions that pay respect to a recipient's negative face (his/her desire to be unimpeded). These actions are avoidance-based and conscious of boundaries that should not be crossed in an interaction. Examples of negative politeness are any actions that refrain from violating a recipient's personal space, desired actions, or sense of privacy (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Participants exercised negative politeness by delivering message in private where interactions did not have audiences (i.e., children or other third parties) and where recipients were not restricted and confined. Participants also exercised negative politeness by omitting insults and threats.
Most participants delivered messages in private and in non-restricting settings. Because of this, recipients were not put on display. They were not forced to talk publicly about issues that were private matters of the relationship and they could also opt to walk away from the situation. By delivering HBH messages in a private setting away from children or other third parties, message givers avoid turning couple-related conversations into public events. Mrs. Underwood said, "I think that sometimes talking to the person without a lot of company around [is important]." She did say, however, that a third party can be useful if the message experience is drawn out over several conversations. The first time she introduced the topic of her husband working too slowly it was in private. Eventually, though, they, as a couple, talked about it with her husband's father, who ended up supporting Mrs. Underwood. Shortly after, her husband conceded the point and admitted it was a good idea to hire professional help. Mrs. Underwood was the only participant to talk about third parties. In another example of privacy being used as a form negative politeness, Mrs. Stevens said she waited to tell her husband he was too loud during their son's curling practice until the two of them were alone. She said she softened the blow by "not saying something at the curling club and waiting until we got home, and you know, [their son] wasn't around either, it was just the two of us." Every other participant was also in a private and non-restricting setting when first giving their HBH message. In two exceptions, participants were traveling in a car when they delivered their messages, and the car can be considered a constricting environment because the recipient is not free to withdraw from the situation like they would be if they were in their home. At the very least, the car is a private environment.

Censoring semantic content in messages was also used as form of negative politeness. Participants refrained from using highly charged insults and making threats. Curse words, name-
calling words, and mean-spirited language obviously run the risk of exacerbating situations. Participants did not want to make their experiences worse than they had to be. For example, Mr. Chase refrained from using curse words. "I never do that," he said. Miss White told her boyfriend he was lazy but said, "I never directly said, 'You're lazy.' I would just give examples of things he was doing that showed laziness." Mrs. Johnson did not want to threaten her husband when she told him he needed to control his temper. She said, "I just didn't want to say anything threatening like 'If you don't I'm going leave you,' or something like that." Censoring highly charged language and omitting threats softened the hurtful aspects of openness. They are forms of negative politeness because they do not impinge the recipient by provoking him/her to engage in defensive behavior.

**Presentational Rituals.** The final two sections cover rituals of deference used by participants. Rituals of deference are described by Goffman (1956) as behaviors which ought to be carried out because they are right and just. Rituals of deference are broken down into presentational and avoidance rituals. Presentational rituals and avoidance rituals are very similar to positive and negative politeness respectively. Presentational and avoidance rituals mark behaviors that should be displayed or avoided in interactions. Because semantic content of messages was covered in previous sections, rituals of deference covers verbal and nonverbal behaviors.

According to Goffman (1956) presentational rituals are "acts through which the individual makes specific attestations to recipients concerning how he regards them and how he treat them in the on-coming interaction" (p. 485). Presentational rituals can communicate esteem for a recipient's face. For example, making eye contact with someone and shaking their hand is a sign of peace. Patting someone on the shoulder is a sign of togetherness. In this study,
participants described verbal presentational rituals as friendly, conversational, and even-keeled in tone. In terms of nonverbal behavior, some participants spoke about eye contact.

For the most part, participants spoke about using friendly and conversational verbal tones in their message deliveries. Of course, there were a few exceptions: before Mr. Chase reframed and corrected his message his verbal tone was "rather strong," and before Miss Brewer corrected and reframed her message her tone was "condescending," and when Mr. Brown told his wife she treated him like shit it was "strong," and when Miss White issued payback it was slightly indignant. However, even if participants began their messages aggressively they tended to move toward a more cordial level. Mr. Chase and Miss Brewer had follow-up conversations, extensions of their message experiences, where they "said things a little bit nicer" (Chase), or in a more "heartfelt" (Brewer) way. Miss White's experience was in reverse: she started "very calm, just a normal conversation," but when things did not go well it turned into "a big altercation." Other participants described their verbal tones as "playful" and "conversational" (Miss Smith), and "even and excited," in "a conversation matter-of-factly." Therefore, aside from the exceptions noted above, participants tried to be verbally non-confrontational in their messages. In this way, they softened the hurtful aspects of openness.

Nonverbally, participants spoke about making eye contact if they could. Some participants who were in the car (Mrs. Johnson and Mr. Chase), or on the phone (Miss White), or in adjacent rooms (Miss Brewer), could not communicate nonverbally. Eye contact, though, was used when participants were face to face with recipients. Miss Smith said, "I kept eye contact," Mr. David said, "I made eye contact," and Mrs. Underwood said, "I think [eye contact] is important." In a slight exception, Mr. Brown was faced away from his wife in the initial stages of the message experience and then made eye contact in the latter stages.
Avoidance Rituals. Avoidance rituals, according to Goffman (1956), are "what is not to be done" in an interaction (p. 485). Like negative politeness, an avoidance ritual pays deference to a recipient's negative face by maintaining physical or topical distance and respecting privacy. Goffman (1956) compares exercising avoidance rituals to respecting the "ideal spheres" of other people, defined by Simmel (1950) as orbs of dignity surrounding people. Verbally, there are no themes of avoidance rituals because to say that a "conversational" tone was a theme of presentational rituals is the same as to say that refraining from aggressive tones was an avoidance ritual. It is obvious and does need to be discussed. Some participants did speak about using quiet and non-threatening gestures, though, and, therefore, they avoided using aggressive gestures. For example, "Mrs. Johnson said, "I tried to remain calm and use quiet gestures and not use my hands a lot." Mr. David said, "I'm not really a gesture type person."

As it was already noted, some participants were logistically limited in terms of nonverbal communication. Also, most participants had a difficult time talking about nonverbal avoidance rituals. They could not remember. Mrs. Underwood said "I can't remember." Miss Brewer said, "I don't remember if I actually did any hand gestures, but probably not" (regardless, Miss Brewer was not even in the same room as her boyfriend at the time). Not remembering nonverbal avoidance rituals was a theme. Participants had a much easier time talking about semantic content in their messages and presentational rituals.

Summary

This chapter analyzed the results reported earlier. The discussion first aimed to discover how dialectic contradictions were relevant to HBH message experiences. The dialectic contradictions analyzed were openness-closedness, autonomy-connection, and predictability-novelty. Second, the discussion attempted to identify strategies of politeness and deference that
were commonly used in HBH message deliveries. Finally, the discussion analyzed how strategies of politeness and deference worked to manage dialectic contradiction. A thematic analysis (Aronson, 1994) was used to guide the discussion. Recurring activities were grouped together thematically to outline common HBH message experiences and to paint a comprehensive picture of typical HBH message experiences.

Openness was tremendously important to HBH message experiences. Experiences could be described as events of openness because disclosure of information was requisite for messages to be considered honest. Participants delivered HBH messages when openness about x was more important than causing hurt. This occurred when a change was desired and when participants needed to vent. In this study, changes were desired when undesirable behaviors belonging to recipients became problematic for the relationship. Change was desired, therefore, to improve relationships. In regards to venting, some participants vented because they did not want to bottle their problems up. Some participants even vented just to vent, having zero confidence that change was possible. Others vented spontaneously in fits of anger and frustration. In each scenario, whether to induce change or vent, participants delivered HBH messages when openness became more important than hurt.

In regards to autonomy-connection, nearly every participant described themselves as independent and, thusly, their relationships as more autonomous. It is surmised that people who are more independent and who are in relationships that are autonomous are more likely to engage in FTAs such as HBH messages because autonomy in not threatened by being hurtful. People who desire more connection run the risk of losing connection as a result of HBH messages (two participants did describe their relationships as more connected and gave messages to increase or repair connection; they seemed to be aware of the delicate situation and their messages seemed
to be carried out with more care). It is also suggested that independent people are more willing to be hurtful because independence requires an inner sense of security. Perhaps, outspokenness is characteristic of independence too. One interesting point is that some participants who described their relationships as autonomous gave messages to seemingly increase connection. Autonomy-connection is therefore not an either/or category. Varying aspects of relationships can be autonomous and connected to different degrees.

Regarding predictability-novelty, participants gave messages that addressed problematic predictable behaviors. Participants wanted to put an end to such behaviors. Some participants also indicated that predictability made it easier to plan and prepare for HBH messages. These participants could choose an appropriate time to deliver messages, and could use techniques that were most likely to be effective. These participants were in long standing relationships and had the necessary experience with their partner to effectively use predictability to their advantage. Finally, two participants in new relationships expressed that novelty played a role in their messages because there was a general vagueness or uncertainty about the future. It is interesting, though, that these participants gave messages that addressed problematic predictable behaviors. Predictability-novelty, like autonomy-connection, is not an either/or category.

In terms of message delivery, participants used various techniques of politeness and deference. Providing logical reasoning, giving compliments, and emphasizing romantic attachment were all forms of positive politeness that were used by participants. Delivering messages in private and censoring certain semantic content of messages were forms of negative politeness employed by participants. Participants spoke about using friendly and conversational verbal tones and utilizing eye contact as forms of presentational rituals and avoiding non-threatening gestures as a form of avoidance rituals. All in all, techniques of politeness were used
to soften hurtful aspects of openness, to emphasize romantic attachment and connection, and to take advantage of predictability.
Conclusion

In most romantic relationships there are two expectations: emotional support and honest communication (Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994). HBH messages break the expectation of emotional support and are inherently face-threatening. FTAs are difficult to carry out and can be intimidating to engage in. Brown and Levinson (1987) state “any rational agent” will avoid engaging in FTAs if possible (p. 63). Nonetheless, FTAs such as HBH messages still occur and when they do, measures are usually taken to limit face-threat. Tact and communication competence play a big role in limiting face-threat. In this study, the experience of HBH messages in romantic relationships was examined.

This study focused on two aspects of HBH message experiences. First, dialectic contradiction was analyzed. The three primary contradictions (openness-closedness, autonomy-connection, & predictability-novelty (Baxter & Montgomery, 1993)) were highlighted to investigate their relevance to HBH message experiences. Second, message delivery was analyzed. Specifically, politeness techniques and rituals of deference were highlighted to investigate how participants exercised communication competence used tact to soften the blow. The objective was to find out how participants carried out an act of communication that “any rational agent” tends to avoid (Brown & Levinson, 1987; p. 63). This chapter discusses practical insight gained from the study’s findings and also identifies limitations. The chapter concludes by suggesting directions for future research.

Practical Insight

Despite the difficulty of delivering HBH messages, many participants reported feeling satisfaction with their experiences. These participants succeeded at causing positive change and they managed to vent effectively without worsening the situation. The common thread in each
story of success seemed to be a plan of action. Participants who had a game plan in place before approaching their partners were happier with their results. In other words, thoughtfulness was important. It gave participants the foresight to anticipate potential problems and counteract them in advance. Plans of action typically included patience and timing, friendliness, clarity, and the willingness to correct and reframe.

Patience was paramount. A person engaging in an FTA must know that a message can be spoken twice to the very same person in two different contexts and yield totally opposite results. There are so many variables at play. Beyond the message there is the location, the setting, the arrangement and positioning of bodies, the recipient's mind set, the message giver's mind set, each one's general level of stress and their overall sentiment. Participants practiced patience by giving messages at a time when the variables were mellowed. Private and placid locations and settings were popular because they were conducive to recipient receptiveness, according to some participants. Some messages were delivered in homes, others in cars, always without company or an audience. Choosing times when recipients were in conversational moods and treating the message as a conversation instead of a conflict was also reported frequently in success stories. Patience and timing were crucial.

Friendliness in tone and demeanor was also reported frequently in success stories. Participants wanted to communicate messages in a kindly manner. This included maintaining a conversational level of volume and tone and stating things in a matter-of-fact way, or in a caring and lovingly way, or even in a playful way. Participants also reported using minimal or low-key gestures to avoid coming across as threatening, though most participants had difficulty reporting anything regarding nonverbal behavior. Some messages took place in cars meaning participants and message recipients were not completely visible to each other. Therefore, nonverbal
communication channels were limited. Some participants were unable to remember their nonverbal behavior meaning it was so minimal as to be not note-worthy. Minimal and low-key gestures possibly reflect participants’ intentions to be non-threatening and friendly.

Participants also conveyed friendliness in messages by making semantic decisions regarding content. Some participants peppered compliments into their messages. They did this by reminding recipients of their worth: one participant told her husband he was a good person, another participant listed off her boyfriend’s recent work accomplishments. Some participants emphasized romantic attachment to convey friendliness: one participant prefaced his message by telling his wife he loved her, for example. Another participant used the term “sweetheart” in her message. These small details can go a long way to establishing connection with recipients making experiences more conversational and friendly and giving messages a better chance of being effective.

Clarity was another aspect of messages that were well thought out. Participants with a plan of action could emphasize clearly their reasoning and motives for giving their messages. They could support their messages with logic. These participants articulated the importance of their messages and conveyed to recipients that messages intended to benefit relationships. A message given clearly that is well supported sounds constructive and helpful opposed to a message that is flippant or pejorative. The latter sounds like complaining or ridiculing. Even if a message is inherently harsh, a clearly stated delivery that justifies itself stands a better chance of being effective. Participants who felt their initial messages were inadequate in this respect corrected and reframed their messages to achieve a better result. Participants strived for clarity when giving HBH messages because messages that are clear and logically sound are more likely to be successful.
In all, participants who were happiest reported being patient, friendly, and transparent. Relational experience seemed to make it easier to facilitate these behaviors and actions. Patience, timing, and clarity are better executed if the message giver knows the patterns and behaviors of the recipient. Couples who have a lot of relational experience are more likely to have knowledge of dialectic contradiction particular to their partnership. The degree of openness with which a message is shared can be judged more confidently. The amount of connection or autonomy a partner desires and the level of predictability in a relationship can help determine the timing and techniques of a message. In this study, participants in newer relationships had more negative experiences when giving HBH messages. These participants failed to design effective game plans for giving their messages, if they even designed a game plan at all. Some participants delivered messages spontaneously. These messages were driven by anger and frustration. They were ineffective. Their timing was not right, their tone and demeanor was not friendly, and their motives were not stated logically and clearly. Participants who gave spontaneous messages needed to have additional conversations with their partners to correct and reframe and repair the damage. Patience and timing, friendliness, and clarity seem like obvious pieces of insight influencing message success but these qualities are often hard to execute in real life situations, especially when the fervor of romance is involved. Romantic relationships can be places of intense passion and carnal conviction and at the same time can be bottomless wells of ire and confusion. Strength of mind, emotional fortitude, and a sense of communication competence and tact are required to negotiate tension romantic relationships.

**Limitations**

This study was limited by the number and demographic make-up of participants, the brevity of interview data, and the reliance on post-hoc retrospective interview data. First, the
number of participants (nine) did satisfy Polkinghorne's (1989) recommendation for phenomenological studies, which is five to twenty-five. Therefore, nine is methodologically sound. However, more participants would have enriched the study. More to the point, a larger and more diverse group of participants would have enriched the study. As it was, seven of the nine participants were female. Males were largely underrepresented. A more balanced sample of gender would have been interesting for the sake of comparison. This study did recruit a good distribution of exclusive dating experiences and marriage experiences, making it possible to analyze various levels of commitments, but if these numbers were intensified better conclusions could have been drawn. Also, this study did not screen participants for cultural make-up and ignored cultural qualities in its analysis. For the record, each participant was white and from the USA. Most participants were Midwesterners. One was from the east coast and another was from the south.

Second, the brevity of interview data limited this study. Because it was difficult to recruit participants, time became a constricting factor. Each participant could only be interviewed once, even though it became apparent that follow-up interviews would have been enriching. Often times, questions that would have been useful during the interviews surfaced post-interview, as early the ride home on some occasions but more often during the writing process. It was also the case that statements made by participants in the latter portion of interviewing (i.e., participants seven, eight, and nine) brought up fresh topics never before considered by the researcher, and made the researcher wish he could ask the participants in the formal stages of interviewing to comment on these topics. One particular example came from a woman who talked about messages becoming sagas that played out over many interactions. In her story she rallied support from a third party, her father-in-law, and finally conveyed her
message effectively and induced change. Other participants could have had similar stories but for some reason were not triggered to share. Rapport with participants varied. Some divulged freely and answered questions with stories, giving an answer and offering a little more. Others answered questions with focused and concise minimalistic statements. The researcher's general interviewing skills and level of comfort improved in the latter stages making these interviews more detailed. Simply, more comprehensive interview data would benefit this study.

Third, this study was limited by post-hoc retrospective interview data. Participants were asked to recall a stressful memory and reproduce details of their actions and emotions. It is common knowledge that over time memories can fade and distort. Participants were liable to forget details of their episodes. It is also possible, in the heat of the moment, participants did not process event accurately. And there is always the danger of participants remembering events as they would have liked to see them transpire. The interview data is not perfect. However, short of video and audio recording actual HBH message episodes, retrospective interviewing is a suitable method of obtaining workable data. To overcome this limitation, interviews must be in-depth, thorough, and as comprehensive as possible.

One final consideration is how phenomenological is this study? This study set out to capture the overarching experience of HBH messages in romantic relationships. Did it achieve its goal? The results read more like a series of case-studies; however, each participant offered their subjective view of reality about a common experience, qualifying this in some way as phenomenology. Perhaps more case-studies need to be collected to truly understand the phenomenological experience of HBH messages in romantic relationships.
Future Directions

There is a lot of potential for future offshoots from this study. First, the current research questions can still be answered more thoroughly and conclusively. Using the same premise, future research can collect more in-depth interviews from a diverse group of participants to develop stronger themes. It would be interesting to recruit a solid group of males and females in exclusive dating and married relationships. It would also be interesting to control for newer relationships and longstanding relationships. Interviews can improve by concentrating on specific message episodes as well as message sagas that take place over periods of time. This would add an interactional dialectic (Rawlins, 1992) slant to the study. Participants could also be asked about third party involvement outside of the actual message episode. For example, did the participant consult with or confide in a friend, family member, counselor, or therapist?

Another plausible offshoot would be to introduce and substitute new variables into this study. For example, a future study could analyze HBH messages and specific types of hurtful message speech acts (Vangelistis, 1994). The study could examine the similarities and differences among types of HMSAs in HBH messages. Likewise, a future study could analyze characteristics of exclusively preventative messages or of exclusively corrective messages and analyze the similarities and differences between preventative and corrective messages. A future study could also introduce a variable of communication competence. In this study, participants could complete a survey that measures competence. Participants who score high can be compared to those who score low and themes can be drawn for how each group described their HBH message experiences. A variable for willingness to hurt would also be an interesting to addition. How easy is it for some people to be hurtful compared to others, and how does this inform about their message experience?
Summary

Participants who had a plan of action for approaching their partner with an HBH message reported the most satisfaction with their experiences. These participants were patient, timely, friendly, and transparent. Many of these participants had a considerable amount of relational experience with the partner who was the recipient of their messages, making it easier for them to plan and prepare for messages. Younger participants and participants in newer relationships tended to give spontaneous messages that were driven by frustration and anger. These participants needed to do additional repair work to reframe and correct their messages. Experience and communication competence certainly play a role in conveying HBH messages effectively.

This study was limited by the low number of participants, a lack of diversity among participants, the brevity of interview data, and the reliance on post-hoc retrospective interview data. As is, however, this study is methodologically legitimate and is a strong exploratory step. Suggestions for future research include using the same premise and research questions to recruit a higher number of participants and conduct more in-depth and comprehensive interviews. New variables can also be introduced and substituted, including giving more analytical priority to the differences among HMSAs and between preventative and corrective messages, and measuring communication competence and willingness to hurt among participants. The topic of HBH messages and romantic relationships is by no means exhausted. More scholarship is needed to advance knowledge on this subject.
References


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1.1 Hurtful Message Speech Acts

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<tr>
<th>Speech Act</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accusation</td>
<td>A charge of fault or offense</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>A description of value, worth, or quality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Directive</td>
<td>An order, set of directions, or command</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advise</td>
<td>A suggestion for a course of action</td>
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<tr>
<td>Express Desire</td>
<td>A statement of preference</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inform</td>
<td>A disclosure of information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>An inquiry or interrogation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Threat</td>
<td>An expression of intention to inflict some sort of punishment under certain conditions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joke</td>
<td>A witticism or prank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lie</td>
<td>An untrue, deceptive statement or question</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.2 Hurtful Message Topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Romantic Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonromantic Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abilities/Intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality Traits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Worth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity/Religion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tables are reproduced from Vangelisti (1994).
Appendix B

Preliminary Questionnaire

Your participation is voluntary. You are guaranteed confidentiality. Your real name not be published or displayed, and any identifiable information about you be removed.

1) In the space below, briefly describe a time when you told a romantic partner something that was honest, and at the same time hurtful. Focus on how you tried to soften the hurtfulness of the message. This can include a current or past romantic partner. However, this experience should involve a relationship that is, or was, exclusive and committed. A list of hurtful message speech acts is provided on the next page.

2) Indicate the status of your relationship at the time of the message.

   Exclusive Dating/Engaged/Married/Other_______

3) Describe, in your own words, how serious you considered the relationship to be at the time of the message.

4) Would you like to participate in a follow-up interview? Yes/No

   Name ____________________ Gender: M___ F___ Other___
   Phone ____________________ Age: ___
   Email ____________________
Appendix C

Interview Guide

Time of interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer:
Interviewee:

Questions and Prompts

Describe the nature of the romantic relationship you wrote about on the preliminary questionnaire.

Was your relationship stable? Unstable?
Would you describe your partnership as independent or interdependent?

Describe the lead up to the episode. Take me through the decision making process.

How did you decide what to say?

How did you decide what not to say?

What else did you consider?

Describe the setting where the HBH message was delivered.

Describe the HBH message delivery episode.

How did you say what you said? What tone did you use? What attitude did you convey?

How did you use your body? Include details about your nonverbal behavior during this.

Did you use any gestures?

Did you make eye contact?

Describe the aftermath.

Did you get your message across satisfactorily?

Did your message cause a positive change? Did your relationship improve?

Would you have done anything differently?