
CONNECTEDNESS

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Connecting with others and others in a meaningful way is a requirement for happiness and success in life. Many mental health issues are the result of disconnectedness. Connectedness requires engaging with oneself and the world and being open to meaningful messages from others. In this sense, connectedness serves as a foundation in the creation of meaning. Since meaning has the potential to induce change, connectedness not only helps realising one's needs, values and aspirations but also to adapt better to the world, which increases the level of well-being and happiness.

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Introduction

Connectedness with other people allows us to change our world. It broadens horizons and understanding, and generates positive feelings. Returning the smile of a stranger makes the world a better place and conveys understanding, while empathically understanding a loved one can be a special moment for oneself and the other. Connectedness is when we exchange meaningful information with another person over time. Any feelings or thoughts associated with it are the consequences of information flows.

When looking at another person we feel something special in that person and in ourselves at the same time. All this is due to our ability to translate meaning into messages, encode, transmit and decode information and translate the messages back into meaning. Resonance, how information within oneself is brought to interact with the new information, plays an important role in the awareness and identification of meaning.

Connectedness with others expands how we feel about ourselves. Exploring the other is similar to exploring ourselves. There is a feedback between the outside and inside worlds. Connecting to another means opening up to flows of information in both directions. Feeling is an aggregate of all the information that we are exchanging with the other person. With a wink or another small gesture, a massive amount of information can be shared with another person, all at once. This may also cause fears to surface that one is becoming more vulnerable because of the insight another person might gain, and insight into an area we may not want to make visible.

Why do we need to connect? It is not only about the connection itself, but also the feelings and the peace that can come with it. In a connected world where information can flow freely between people, negative feelings are reduced. The goal of life is greater connectedness and more fluid information flows across the world. Connectedness is thus an expression also of our humanity and our connection

with life on this planet overall. Information scuttling back and forth only stops when life stops. Connectedness is thus life sustaining. There is tremendous power in connectedness, which many people unfortunately cannot explore to the fullest. Fears can stand in the way of connecting with others. Maybe we have learned from our past experiences not to fully trust ourselves or others, not to fully trust either. This can make it more difficult to connect. However, once we can see how we are connected with the world and with others, the fear decreases. It may take a leap at first, but experiencing this connectedness makes it easier to be connected.

The feeling of connectedness can also have an effect on the other person, which can make any interaction with them easier. Radiating contentment and happiness tells a love interest or a business partner that we feel confident in ourselves and trust them, which makes these encounters more rewarding for everyone involved. It also helps form bonds and relationships with other people. A first important step is the openness to experience the contentment and happiness one could feel within oneself. This may sometimes not so easy, because of the things we feel we have to do to attain these feelings. But once we realize that these feelings actually serve the connection with another person, they become easier.

The better we can communicate with ourselves, the better we can communicate with other people. Openness and empathy help to understand others, but also show that one is at ease with oneself. Happiness is an important prerequisite to be able to engage in fulfilling interactions, and this requires connecting with the own happiness on the inside. With the right information we can activate centers of the brain that allow us to feel more happiness. The information from connectedness lets us do this as well.

The Illusion

Everything outside connectedness is really an illusion. When we connect with ourselves and with others, real and meaningful information can flow. This is the information that maintains life and our connectedness into life. Where no meaningful information flows, it is our mind that projects meaning into it, where there is none, however. This meaning is then coming from ourselves rather than the person or object outside. However, when we connect, and there is a meaningful exchange of information, we begin to see beyond the illusion. If we see, for example, a rock on our way and certain

thoughts and feelings come up in us, that is really because we are connecting with ourselves, while having the sensory information about the rock, rather than us connecting directly with the rock.

The illusion can also apply to oneself. If we feel we may appear in a certain way to someone else or to ourselves, these thoughts really come from connecting with ourselves. The only way we can really know what someone else thinks about us can only come from connecting with the other person, by, for example, asking them. Thus communication helps us experience reality more deeply rather than the illusion of what may seem real. We often go through life making assumptions about other people, including whether they like us or not or if we cause another person distress, without knowing whether this is just our projection of self-criticism into the other person or if it is true. Since you cannot mind read, the best option is often to ask and talk about it. One does not even have to ask about it specifically, but can put a question or statement out there, whose acceptance or rejection by the other shows if the feared assumption is true or not.

Experiencing connectedness itself means getting in touch with something very fundamental to life in general, which can be described as the all-pervasive divine. When we go beyond connecting with a specific person, but feel a general connectedness with everything, feelings of separatedness, loneliness, helplessness, and anxiety usually wither away. This in turn can make it easier to connect with a specific person as the anxiety to do so decreases. The uncertainty leading to anxiety and fears is reduced when there is more and better information about oneself and the other person. Meaningful communication with oneself and others through greater connectedness provides this information and thereby reduces anxiety, fears, doubts, helplessness, and powerlessness.

Beyond the Illusion

When you feel connected with everyone and everything you have moved beyond the illusion of a concrete thought concept, and many everyday fears begin to fall away. How should I feel connected with an angry neighbor? Important is that you do not just connect with the present form and attributes of the neighbor, their personality, emotional state, and so forth, but with what underlies both of you. You are both human beings and you are both alive. From there one can then go beyond form and sense that fine existence that suffuses everything. Feeling grounded in this common existence can be helpful in regulating fears, anger, and other emotions that can stand in the way on one's path.

What did I mean by the ‘fine existence’? It is one of the many things that religion and physics can agree on. In physics, even empty space is by no means ‘empty’. In quantum field theory, for example, a quantum vacuum is the state with the lowest possible energy and generally contains no physical particles. However, according to quantum mechanics, the vacuum state is not truly empty but instead contains fleeting electromagnetic waves and particles that pop into and out of the quantum field. So, even the seemingly informationless contains information in the form of these transient events. We are never alone, even, and maybe particularly, in the seemingly ‘empty’. Maybe it is apparent absolute emptiness that provides a clearer view on the true essence of things. In true connectedness one is plugging into this essence that underlies all, which is the ultimate reality and no illusion.

Whether you are on a date or in a high stakes situation in work, you will notice that the more you plug into the deepest layers of understanding and connectedness, communication with the other will also be much more meaningful because you are going behind external appearances and forms that would just slow you down. Communicating about them without seeing them as the ultimate goals and reasons for the interaction with the other, will free you of fears and make it less likely that you are getting side tracked by the irrelevant. It also makes it easier for the other person to understand you, as you understand the other person better.

The Happiness of Connectedness

Happiness is an emotion we often feel when we are engaged in something that is meaningful and valuable to us. When we are engaged in something that is meaningful, that contains the promise of something novel that can change us, we feel happiness. Whether solving a science problem, observing another person, having sex or talking to someone else, we are engaged in processes that produce new meaning, new information, and often a sense of happiness. Communication with oneself and others, the exchange of meaningful information, is ultimately what leads to more meaning and greater happiness.

To create meaning with another person, however, also means that one has to contribute something meaningful. In a situation where people are on a date, for example, there needs to be an actual exchange of information to create more meaning, and, as a consequence, more connectedness. Happiness is often a result of this.

Connectedness can come in many shapes and forms, but it appears that the more meaning can also be generated about the relationship through meaningful communication, the more satisfying the relationship is. For example, in ‘friends with benefits’ who lack the deeper romantic relationship, one would expect that there is less satisfactions and less communication in some areas. And this was also shown in a study using an online survey (Lehmiller et al., 2014). In this study, friends with benefits, who were also found to be less sexually exclusive,

- had a lower frequency of sexual interaction and were less sexually satisfied,
- generally communicated less about sex than romantic partners did, and
- communicated more often about extradyadic sexual experiences.

In other words, happiness has a lot to do with meaning, and communication is how we feel more meaning. Memories of laughter with friends can make us smile because the information has meaning to us. It resonates with other information that we have on the inside. The emotions are triggered because this memory links to our needs, values and aspirations. The brain also associates it with other information, which can trigger positive emotions.

Unfortunately, there is much unhappiness in our world because of disconnectedness, internal and external. Wars, social injustice, and many other phenomena that plague our societies have psychological roots that can be traced back to how people connect with themselves and others. Unfortunately, we do not learn in school how we better get in touch with ourselves and others. We learn to operate on information, but usually in a very narrow, external, and technical way. We spend much more time on how to do research at a library than identifying our own needs, values, and aspirations, only to haunt us after decades in personally unfulfilling work. Learning how to better communicate with oneself and others should be considered an important toolset for survival and happiness.

Connectedness to Find What Makes Happy

Connectedness with oneself and others is closely related. Through connection with ourselves and others we can gain insight into the things and activities that can increase our happiness, satisfaction and contentment. However, the connection with oneself, also on a feeling level, is fundamental to this discovery process. Without this internal connectedness, it is impossible to find insight into one’s own basic parameters of needs, values and aspirations (Haverkamp, 2017b, 2018f). Many people feel the

pressure from what they think the world expects of them. Simply internalizing external expectations will not bring happiness. My thoughts and actions have to make sense in relation to how I see myself and what I value.

The right information can increase happiness. Throughout life we learn what works and what does not work. All this is valuable information. This does not mean one needs to make a lot of mistakes, but that one should be where there is high quality information. Connecting with oneself and others makes it more likely that one acquires the right information. The more information I have about options in the world and what I truly value, the easier will it be to find greater happiness in the world. Meaningful information, which can be anything from a fact to an emotional signal when engaging in a task, coupled with reflection about it leads to better decision making, greater success in all areas of life, and a greater sense of happiness, contentment and satisfaction. Connectedness is a very important aspect.

Disconnectedness and Fear

Disconnectedness causes fear, but at the same time fear can lead to a greater disconnect. People are often afraid to approach one another. This may have to do with how they see themselves. If one is self-critical or has learned not to show too much of oneself, whether emotions or otherwise, the apprehensiveness in making contact or deepening contact is often greater. Thus an internal disconnect in feeling one's strengths and resources can then lead to an external disconnect.

Many types of fear and anxiety become less intense or vanish when we feel connected with others around us (Haverkamp, 2017b). This is something that can be observed in the fear of flying, for example. If I am talking to others on the airplane as it takes off, and even if the topic is my fear of flying, the anxiety will be lower. Even if the anxiety is a shared anxiety, it usually helps to reduce the anxiety. Sharing it is helpful, but if I also feel that the other understands what I experience, the effect on the anxiety will be even more powerful.

An important objective in therapy is to help patients in building the skills to experience better connectedness, which is one of the main components of Communication-Focused Therapy® (Haverkamp, 2010b, 2017a) Greater connectedness helps to build greater self-confidence and sense of self-efficacy and offers significant protection from anxiety, low mood, and other mental health issues. Clinically, there are also indications how patients with OCD can benefit from greater

connectedness. Even psychosis can be more manageable for the patient if they experience a more solid connectedness with themselves and others. Since all the conditions mentioned come with feelings of instability and overlap with fear to some extent, greater connectedness can reduce fear also indirectly.

Needs, Values and Aspirations

One's values and basic interests determine what is valuable to oneself. Happiness requires that one engages in an activity that is meaningful and of value to oneself. Engaging in these activities and situations brings more positive emotions, happiness, and a greater sense of fulfilment in life. Wants and Needs that create greater happiness correlate with one's values.

The basic values (Haverkamp, 2018f), the needs, values and aspirations are an important foundation in connectedness because they determine whether the connection will be maintained and intensified. The benefit from a communication is greater when needs, values and aspirations are shared. Since information about them is exchanged in everything one does, it would be difficult to hide them. Maybe sometimes people feel misled by a connection with another person, but it is often that they are ignoring signs which are there to be detected.

At the same time, connectedness should further what one truly needs, values and aspires to. Some of those things are material to keep us alive, but many are beyond the material. Many entrepreneurs who built successful businesses and large companies did so because they enjoyed working on something and the challenge as well as changing the world. Money is a poor end in itself. What drives people is to do what is meaningful and relevant to do them, and one's true needs, values and aspirations.

On the other hand, internal connectedness is needed to better identify the own needs, values and aspirations. Memory can be an important tool. I can remember what I enjoy in the past, which helps me identify what I may also enjoy in the present and in the future. Our needs and value stay relatively constant over time, as long as they are authentic in the sense that they represent what you want and not what you think you need to fulfill another deeper need or meet a deeper value. Unfortunately, much of what people believe that they want or need is just something that appears to contain a promise of fulfilling a deeper need. You may think of someone who is pursuing 'a career' in order to be respected and loved. There is nothing wrong with achievement, but many feel they need to have

a career without being able to say where the journey should go and how it satisfies their authentic needs and values, the ones that align with who they are. A general problem in most modern societies is that there is little emphasis on the question of self-awareness and self-knowledge that goes beyond the imperatives of the ego.

The Call of Happiness

Almost everyone strives for happiness in life, and the pursuit of happiness is enshrined in the US constitution and many other important documents, but many people feel it is beyond their reach. Some may suffer from a mental health condition like depression, which reduces the amplitude of one's felt emotions overall, including happiness, and may require treatment. A larger problem is possibly missing direction in life and decision-making, which often is a result of being disconnected from oneself. If one feels what is valuable and meaningful to oneself, this leads to actions and thoughts that generate greater happiness.

Disconnectedness is widespread in our society. People often try to connect with others before they connected with themselves, which makes it impossible to connect with another on a deeper level. The magic word here is resonance. When we have information about ourselves in the right form, when we have awareness and insight into ourselves, we can recognize it in other people. This also allows to see the uniqueness of the other person. Experiencing the uniqueness of the other person and the common thread behind it can lead to more positive feelings and make us happier.

However, the connectedness with others is also a reflection of the connectedness we have with ourselves. Connecting with oneself means perceiving a whole universe within oneself. Unfortunately, to many people who do not fully connect with themselves see an inner desert rather than rich, open and wide spaces that contain many magnificent objects. As our external world is built on information, so is this internal world. While information is already built into our brains biologically, they are constantly suffused in oceans of information that they are exposed to from all directions. It is not just or even primarily the information from the outside world that shapes our thoughts and feelings, but how we process this information. And this is the beauty of the nervous system's reality, that information changes information by altering how it is processed. If I am told the ending of a book, I will read it differently, have different thoughts and feelings while reading it, and even remember it differently in the future, which can have a real impact on my future thoughts and behaviors and literary buying choices. And the cycle continues.

The Ego

The ego is in much literature seen as something that needs to be destroyed, or at least seriously truncated, in order to find happiness. Our ego is what clings to things and causes much suffering. At the same time, it is important to remember that people with ‘huge egos’, classic narcissists, to whom it is never enough, actually need to compensate for the perception of a weak and somewhat fragile ego. As the ego is where much of the action in the world, good and bad, comes from, would we really get rid of it? One answer to this question is that we cannot, because it does not really exist. It is merely a figment of our imagination, something that makes sense to us within the marvelous information processing dynamics of our brain. But to realize that it does not really exist, helps to focus on the real issue. What we perceive as ‘ego issues’ are really an experienced disconnectedness from ourselves, and as a result from the world. With greater connectedness, these pathologies of the ego disappear, because connectedness replaces them with a healthy experience of oneself.

The Fear of Disconnect

One reason for the ego may be to prevent us from disconnecting, yet at the price of making a disconnect even more painful. The ultimate disconnect an organism faces is, of course, death, at least in most modern Western societies. It is easily forgotten that not long ago, just a mere couple of centuries, in Europe and elsewhere people saw themselves more as a part of a whole, as integrated to a larger degree into the rhythms and cycles of nature. The birth of the separate individual as an autonomous actor as we know her or him today is a fairly recent invention. And it may be the greater focus on the individual and individual histories, memories, and accomplishments that provides us with greater pressure to achieve and the sense to ‘make the most’ of one’s life, but at the same time increases the visibility and sense of being an island disconnected from others. All of these consequences of a certain brand of individuality, without the psychology and spirituality to complement it, contribute to anxiety, depression and burnout in many. As I have explored in greater depth in my book *The Lonely Society* (Haverkamp, 2010e), it is not the technological advances in communication or greater flexibilities in communicating which are causing the problems, but the lack of communication in society about communication. It is not taught in school, and everyone is too busy

in having a socially acceptable career to pause and reflect on how to use the tremendous powers of communication to effect real change within and without.

The fear of disconnect from the world and others often drives people to withdraw even more. Why expose oneself to potential hurt? However, the real antidote is a greater connectedness with others and the world. Helpful is here often to start communicating about communicating, which is done in psychotherapy. I have developed Communication-Focused Therapy® particularly to address this, whereby greater awareness for communication patterns, reflection, experimentation, and feedback can bring about a lasting change within and without (Haverkamp, 2010b, 2017a, 2018c).

Curiosity and Wonder

Connectedness can be facilitated by the attitude one takes towards engagement with the world and other people. An attitude of curiosity and wonder, for example, affects how one selects and takes up information and processes it. At the same time, it creates also changes in the other person if one is communicating with someone else. If I talk to someone who is interested, curious and open to what I am saying, this not only changes how I perceive them, but also how I interact with them. It is therefore helpful to go mentally into oneself and light a candle of curiosity and wonder when communicating with another, be it at the workplace, on a date or in a shop.

Peace

Greater connectedness with ourselves and others brings about feelings of peace. Where there is understanding and insight, the disturbance of everyday life comes to rest. Anger, hate and resentment can only exist where there is a lack of understanding and insight, a lack of meaningful information. Communication is what allows us to see things with the eyes of the other and to understand what they must be feeling and thinking. However, fear is often in the way, a fear not only of the other but a fear also of themselves. Understanding another human being changes our world, even if that readjustment seems small. But it is this change which can cause enormous fears. When a new view of the world comes along, often people try to protect their own views, their own ego, because it seems to impart stability and safety. But what actually happens is a further instability and fragility by holding on rigidly instead of opening the heart and mind to more meaningful information.

Peace is not necessarily the full absence of any emotional pain and suffering one might still experience, but it means that there is at least insight into it, an awareness of them, for if we become aware of suffering it begins to self-transform and resolve itself. However, this requires connectedness with oneself, an inner meaningful communication, being open to internal information flows.

A Disconnected World

As I have outline before (Haverkamp, 2010e), we live in a world that is on one hand increasingly connected but on the other hand also increasingly disconnected. There is much on the Internet which provides us with the illusion of greater connectedness, but at the same time makes the exchange of information less meaningful. The emphasis is on meaningful information, that is information, which can bring about a change in another. Whether it is a change in perspective or a smile, meaningful communication changes how we process information in the future, it has a regulatory effect on communication among all that are directly or indirectly effected by it, which ultimately means the entire planet.

As peace is based also on understanding and meaningful communication, pockets in the world that do not communicate with each other can be at peace, but they do not contribute to the improvement and well-being of each other. Cutting off communication has been the instrument of dictators, but this is becoming less and less possible. While it is possible to cut a cable, information can travel in some many other ways. There is a point when it will ultimately seep through. The only question is then whether it will be decoded and processed adequately by the receiver or receivers. Decoding and understanding a message are skills that are to some extent innate, but mostly learned throughout life. And how do we learn them? Through practice, by exposure to meaningful information, together with curiosity, reflection, and feedback. The more meaningful communication there is around us and in us, the easier it becomes for us to work with messages from wherever they come. So, the best way to promote a connected world is to make available communication channels that stimulate the flow of meaningful information.

Intimacy

Intimacy, when it is fulfilling, is a mental and physical escalation of connectedness. While the dopamine rush of physical sex can lead to a transient high, research shows that sex just for the purpose

of sex is usually less fulfilling if emotional and other forms of connectedness are missing. Practicing intimacy is the ability to make close connections with the openness to receive sensations, perceptions and other information which could be potentially hurtful. This means that one needs to overcome fear to be able to be intimate with another. The fear of being hurt is something that can arise from early experiences in life that are no longer accessible to conscious awareness. But it can also manifest at any later stage in life. Like a physical hurt, an emotional hurt occurs if something disturbs the sense of integrity, in this case the emotional one. Feeling hurt calls for repair of this loss of the sense of integrity, whether outside or inside. This does not mean reconstituting an original status quo, but to use the healing process to feel whole again. Connectedness with oneself and others is the means to get there. And, if one has confidence in one's ability to connect, the fear of being hurt can be reduced considerably, which also increases the capability to be intimate.

Intimacy comprises the exchange of much information, tactile, visual, and otherwise, through a large number of communication channels synchronously. At the same time this information resonates with the information that already exists. A romantic date and intimacy are built on past communication experiences with the other person and on future expected ones. They have meaning and intensity because of their context within these past experiences and expectations of the future. Intimacy is exciting because of uncertainty, the mystery of how communication unfolds in the present and may be affected in the future. Emotionally powerful moments are powerful because they drive us towards change in some way, internally and externally.

That communication apart from the sexual act is the most powerful determinant of intimacy becomes clear in those cases where the communication is missing or gone horribly wrong, such as in cases of rape. One may speak here of sex, but not intimacy. It is ultimately not fulfilling and extremely destructive. The lack of meaning generated in such situation, the meaninglessness, reflects back on people will also feel internally. Communication can be highly destructive when it leaves a large hole where there should be meaning.

A fear of intimacy is quite common and basically not different from any other fear of connectedness. As will be illustrated in the example on romantic dating, the possibility that a connection can end, as in the form of rejection, for example, may lead to a fear of making the connection in the first place. The dilemma is that we want to see and feel a connection as important to us, but at the same time this raises the stakes, when the connection is lost.

Example: The Romantic Date

The author has explored the details of the communication dynamics of romantic dates elsewhere (Haverkamp, 2010c, 2010d, 2017e, 2020). What makes a romantic date so unique is that from an evolutionary perspective communication in the dating situation determines the future of the species. It is thus no wonder that it is one of the situations where we can observe communication at its most complex, even though it follows the same rules of communication and information.

The quality of communication seems to be related to attraction and the desire to see the other again. Its importance in a study by Sprecher and Duck, however, was greater for women than for men and greater for friendship attraction than for romantic attraction. (Sprecher & Duck, 1994) The connectedness itself is the important criterion whether a date will be successful. Maybe at first only some needs become clear, while values and aspirations develop over time. But they shine through the space between spoken words and within them, in gestures and all other behaviors and interactions which may constitute communication. If one makes another person laugh, it also shows an understanding of another person's basic parameters. This can be quite general in the case of a comedian or quite specific as in two people on a date. The sense of connectedness facilitates communication, reducing the fears and increasing meaningfulness. Thus, building the feeling of connectedness can already have a significant positive influence on the dynamics of the interaction, whether a romantic date, a job interview or a presentation in an academic environment.

It may be possible to pretend, but only if there is inherently a disconnect with oneself, which in the future will make a real connection more difficult. A deep connectedness with oneself usually makes one strive for the connections that are really meaningful rather than wasting time and resources on the ones that are less so. However, it may first take some time to find out what really works for oneself. Over time it becomes clearer.

Avoiding Rejection

The emotional risks from rejection can influence how we choose our communication channels to make a connection (Haverkamp, 2010a). For example, online daters exploit certain communication features provided by dating website messaging services which allow new ways for romantic refusals to be performed that were not previously available in face-to-face communication or earlier forms of computer-mediated communication. (Tom Tong & Walther, 2011) No one likes to be rejected by

another person, but there can be large individual differences in how bad it feels. Not taking it personally may be impossible, but the perspective one has and the communication patterns one uses with oneself and with others can make a large difference. Uniqueness and a perceived need for this uniqueness in another person can make rejection more hurtful. However, this is often a problem of misidentified needs. The better the basic parameters, the needs, values and aspirations are identified, the lower will be the emotional shock of rejection and the easier it will be to connect with another human being. Over time, we gain the insight that there is no rejection but only signals of incompatibility, and if there is no match on a deeper values in the parameters that count, the values, interests and aspirations, it is better not to invest energy in trying to make the impossible work.

You may disagree and say, we were 'soulmates'. However, reality is that no matter what you say and do, the soulmate will remain in your life. Logic, on any level, just requires that. If there is a breakup, it means there is a misalignment in some area or areas that are important to the partners. But does that not negate the usefulness of any form of couples' therapy? No, it doesn't. Couple's therapy, and psychotherapy in general, is often misunderstood as 'changing' someone. Instead, the real objective is to facilitate meaningful communication, outside and inside, that allows autoregulatory processes to readjust communication patterns in such ways that the partners can see, hear and understand each other again. But no therapy in the world will change who one is. It would be an apocalyptic world in which this were possible. Rather, connectedness creates confidence in oneself and others, awareness, and understanding to be able to experience that what connects a couple, and, in a broader light, underlies it all.

Communication Structures

Connecting with another human being has an emerging and changing dynamic within a structured framework (Haverkamp, 2010a, 2010c). This framework is determined by biology, psychological, social and situational factors, as well as the basic parameters (Haverkamp, 2019). Motives and expectations affect the courtship sequence as a function of a variety of individual and social variables (Cunningham & Barbee, 2008). Cunningham and Barbee describe three stages in the courtship process (Cunningham & Barbee, 2008):

- a) attract attention
- b) notice and approach
- c) talk and reevaluate

d) touch and synchronize

It is easy to see how changes in communication patterns and variations in an individual's effectiveness at the different stages of communication, from encoding a message to decoding it, can affect the progress along the phases of the courtship process. Since any communication process and structure serves the overall purpose of building and sharing meaning (Haverkamp, 2010a, 2018g), the romantic partner's ability to communicate and create meaning keeps the romance alive and moves it forward. The dynamics of changing communication patterns and the overall communication structure are the manifestations of changing relationships (Haverkamp, 2017d). To be aware of them and to work with them is key in establishing the level of connectedness one desires.

Clarity and Openness

The sheer quantity of dating advice, seminars and conferences out there, from little tips and tricks to reprogramming one's personality, is mind boggling. It seems much of their appeal is to be able to communicate what one wants without saying it. Research, however, shows that the best strategy is actually saying it. Whether something is communicated or not determines what happens next, and connectedness with another person, which is the precondition for any form of relationship, requires communicating something about one's needs, values and aspirations (Haverkamp, 2018b). There is some support that directness in communicating has a negative association with relationship uncertainty and with partner uncertainty that is mediated by relationship uncertainty (Theiss & Solomon, 2006). The communication dilemma (Haverkamp, 2018a) is that communication becomes easier if there is more certainty, but to reach more certainty one needs communication to provide the information.

Clarity and openness help to reduce uncertainty as more meaningful information is available. Relational uncertainty and intimacy are related. Relational uncertainty tends to be high in non-intimate associations and substantially lower in highly intimate associations. (Solomon, 2015) Clarity and openness are thus important steps in intimacy.

Transition

As connectedness increases, a relationship usually goes through transitions. Changes in communication patterns and in the framework of the communication structure signify these

transitions. In the case of a developing romantic relationship, Mongeau and colleagues describe three changes that occur (Mongeau et al., 2006):

1. two people meet and talk for the first time,
2. they communicate regularly and get to know and like each other,
3. the discovery and consummation of mutual romantic interest; the romantic relationship transition between a man and a woman, when the relationship changes from being either platonic or nonexistent to being romantic

What these three changes have in common is that they describe changes in communication. But it goes even further, as relationship transitions are changes in both internal and external communication patterns (Haverkamp, 2010a, 2010c, 2018b). As relationships are kept alive and progress through communication transitions, they require an openness for external and internal changes. Communication-Focused Therapy (CFT), as developed by the author, works on both the internal and external communication patterns, which to a large extent reflect each other (Haverkamp, 2017a).

Communication about Communication

Communicating about how we communicate, internally and externally, is a powerful tool in changing communication (Haverkamp, 2010b, 2017a, 2018e). Since relationships and our experiences in them are determined by the communication dynamics in them, experience and communication are linked. Marston and colleagues found empirical evidence for the a strong coherence in lovers' experience of love and in their reports of how love is communicated (Hovick et al., 2003; Marston et al., 1987). The link between our experience and the communication patterns we use is not only valuable from a therapeutic perspective, but it also provides an insight for the considerable stability of communication patterns and relationships patterns over time (Haverkamp, 2018e).

A deeper connectedness means that there are also deeper interactions with the ability to communicate about communicating. The ability to change communication patterns by calling them into awareness and reflecting about them together, not only solidifies a relationship but also enables it to regulate itself better. When two partners in a relationship can talk about how they communicate, they are far less likely to get lost in details or in destructive exchanges. Awareness of the communication patterns also lets both of them look behind the veil of the seemingly important. If they

watch their communication, they may, for example, see that behind the anger, that seems to drive them apart, is really a helplessness, which drives them closer together.

Relational Uncertainty and Communication

The level of connectedness is determined by and determines the communication patterns we use, but it also influences the content of the communication. As we have seen above, the more meaning that can be communicated, the stronger the connectedness will be. Meaning and connectedness go hand in hand, which is one reason why helping a person communicate better also creates more meaning in the life of that person (Haverkamp, 2010a, 2017a, 2018b). However, it is also possible that the individual meaning a person sees in life effects the openness and communication about meaning. At the same time, openness may be lower the less one knows about the other person and the nature of the relationship. In a study by McCurry and colleagues, results indicated that relational uncertainty was inversely associated with the frequency and comfort with which dating partners discussed religious and spiritual topics (McCurry et al., 2012). There is thus a vicious cycle between the fear of greater openness and less communication about meaning which could reduce the fear.

Uncertainty in the context of interpersonal interactions generally refers to an inability to predict and explain a communication partner's behavior (Berger, 1997). Relational uncertainty is the degree of confidence people have in their perceptions of involvement in a relationship (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). According to Knobloch and Solomon, relational uncertainty stems from three sources: doubts individuals have about their own involvement in the relationship (self uncertainty); questions about a partner's participation in the relationship (partner uncertainty); and ambiguity about the status or future of the relationship itself (relationship uncertainty). Relational certainty exists when people clearly understand their own commitment to the relationship, when they are confident in their perceptions of a partner's involvement (or lack thereof), and when they have few doubts about the enduring or fleeting nature of the association; relational uncertainty occurs when individuals are unclear about these aspects of the relationship. Individuals experiencing relational uncertainty are more likely to describe their relationship as unsteady or unstable (Knobloch, 2007).

Meaningful communication by its definition can reduce uncertainty, if it is related to the locus of uncertainty. In every scenarios, whether on a date or at the workplace, it is not so much the quantity of communication but the quality that counts. There is too much 'empty' talk out there, which does not help the people involved in any of the situations mentioned. The reason is often that one

'performs' instead of being oneself, centered in oneself and mindful to the other person and the situation. Feeling like a guest in someone else's reality does not help to communicate more authentically and meaningfully. On the other hand, if one watches with interest, communicates to build meaning, and is aware of one's true needs, values and aspirations, something real can evolve, which maintains and kindles more meaningful communication.

Digital Communication

Online spaces are used infrequently for meeting romantic partners, but play a significant role in how teens flirt, woo and communicate with potential and current flames. (Lenhart et al., 2015) Digital communication offers fewer communication channels and a more controlled space than would be available when meeting another person in real life. It can make it easier for an individual to overcome the fears of direct communication and being overwhelmed by information. Many relationships have been made possible because they started with a small set of only a single communication channel. In times past, this may have been an exchange of letters. In today's world, it may be a chat on a dating app.

Digital communication has the advantage that it allows the observation of how people connect and what their topics are when they do if they consent to it. A study by Dong and colleagues based on a survey of 240 individual MySpace users found that (Dong et al., 2008)

- low self-esteem encourages young adults to engage in romantic communication (such as having intimate communication with the opposite sex and looking for romantic partners)
- higher emotional intelligence discourages such activity
- those who have a higher self-image, such as thinking themselves attractive and happy with their appearance, tend to engage in romantic communication.

Communication thus seems to fulfil an essential role in emotional regulation. It also appears that merely engaging in it can already have a positive effect. In many forms of digital communication, the other person is not physically present, but an image and a felt emotional connection with that person

Communication Styles

An overview of communication structure and patterns has been provided by the author in greater depth elsewhere (Haverkamp, 2019). All communication follows particular rules, which also gives rise

to the evolution of distinct patterns and structures. Working with them is an essential pillar in Communication-Focused Therapy (CFT) (Haverkamp, 2010b, 2017a), and understanding them can be helpful in all situations in daily life, which required internal and external communication.

It is crucial to keep in mind that communication patterns depend on the kind of relationship one has with another person (Haverkamp, 2010a). Both cross-sex platonic and romantically involved partners use flirtation to varying degrees. However, how flirtatiousness is actually displayed and how it relates to evaluations of appropriateness and communication competence differs between the two types of relationships. (Egland et al., 1996)

From a much more macroscopic perspective in the area of romantic dating, there is empirical support for five styles of communicating romantic interest in others (Hall et al., 2010): physical, sincere, playful, polite, and traditional. Following the argument above that open and full communication can help strengthen the connectedness, one would expect communication styles that help to share relationship affirming messages facilitate escalating a relationship faster. In a study by Hall and colleagues, dating success correlated with physical, sincere, and playful styles. The physical and sincere styles correlated with rapid relational escalation of important relationships with more emotional connection and greater physical chemistry. (Hall et al., 2010) In other word, it appears that

- the physical style and
- the sincere style

correlate with both dating success and the development of greater emotional connection and physical chemistry. These also appear to be the styles of communication which are less influenced by social convention (as in the polite and traditional style) or conscious communication techniques in response to what the other may be expecting (as in the playful styles). This would support the general communication hypothesis that people are at their most effective when they directly communicate the basic parameters, their needs, values, and aspirations (Haverkamp, 2018f, 2018b).

One has to marvel at the wide range of communication styles that are used in connecting with others. But this may not be as surprising when one considers that the use of particular communication patterns and styles also carries meaning (Haverkamp, 2018d, 2018g). This applies to all areas of human communication. Egland and colleagues identified four types of flirtation behaviour in their study through factor analysis (Egland et al., 1996), namely display, stereotyped, attentiveness, and conversational behaviours.

Transition and Uncertainty

The transition from casual to serious involvement in dating relationships largely corresponds with changes in internal and external communication patterns and changes in the overall communication structure (Haverkamp, 2010c). These changes often happen without conscious awareness of them. The partners do not even have to know that they are transitioning, but the communication patterns always change.

The relational turbulence model is an example of a framework that explains the increased conflict, negative emotions, and heightened relationship thinking in transition times. Relational uncertainty and interference from a partner are heightened when intimacy transitions from casual and independent relating to serious and mutually committed involvement. Empirical findings show that doubts about the relationship are salient even within very casual associations and resolving relational uncertainty may be an important part of forming an intimate bond. (Solomon, 2015) An existential uncertainty is present from the beginning of any relationship, and navigating through it with the use of communication can lead it through the transitions that ultimately result in a fulfilling committed partnership (Haverkamp, 2010a, 2017e, 2017d, 2017c).

Relational uncertainty and interference from a partner have been linked to more pronounced experiences of negative emotions, such as hurt, jealousy, anger, and sadness, both in response to a partner's behavior and in general. (Solomon, 2015) They can impair communication and lead to cognitive biases. Relational turbulence theory links cognitive appraisals and emotions to communication. It describes how episodes characterized by biased appraisals, intense emotions, and volatile communication coalesce into global evaluations of relationships as turbulent (Solomon et al., 2016). McLaren and colleagues proposed that relational communication (specifically, perceptions of dominance, and disaffiliation) is the mechanism linking relational qualities to hurt. Empirical data shows that people's experiences of hurt vary as a function of both relationship characteristics and relational inferences, although there are differences between the sexes. (McLaren et al., 2012)

Not Communicating

While it may be impossible overall not to communicate, it is possible not to exchange specific information. Since meaningful information can trigger other meaningful information, for better or for

worse, the fear of talking about a controversial subject is often greater when there is less certainty about the other person. In the beginning of any relationship, from business to romantic, there is usually a lack of knowledge about the other person, which impacts communication patterns and content (Haverkamp, 2010a, 2018d). It has been shown that the higher (or lower) is the relational uncertainty the higher (or lower) is topic avoidance in romantic relationships (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004). Knobloch and colleague also showed that relational uncertainty mediates the (convex) association between intimacy and topic avoidance.

One may wonder how deeper relationships get started at all. One reason why they can evolve is simply because they develop gradually and in stages. Even if the partners seem to skip a stage because it may be short or not as visible, usually they go through all of them. But all this can end when communication stops. How can people then still feel connected when they no longer communicate?

Connectedness is also a Feeling

People who do not communicate can still feel connected. One needs to keep in mind that the feeling of connectedness can be triggered by any information, which can also be the memory of a past event or the image of a future one. There does not have to be a constant stream of external information to feel connected. Information on the inside is fully sufficient. Another feature of the feeling of connectedness is that it can contain a wish, and quite often does so. It has a gravitational pull that aims at bringing the two individuals closer together. In an autoregulatory feedback loop, connectedness breeds greater connectedness.

The feeling of connectedness thus not depend on the actual physical presence of another being. One could sit in a hut in the forest and still feel connected with people one know or imagines and with nature overall. One could even be drifting in a capsule in outer space and feel connected with people, animals, plants, or even the universe as a whole. The feeling is caused by flows of internal information, that may be influenced by external information. But the latter does not seem to be a requirement for it.

The Stability of the Self and One's Values

Our values are mostly stable over time and allow us to pursue goals in life. Having insight into one's true needs, values and aspirations can help to find greater stability in the world and to pursue and reach what is important to us. Sometimes they may appear to be in conflict, but the more basic needs and values can be explored by paying closer attention to the communication patterns used when engaging in activities and behaviors. When someone does something which brings about feelings of fulfillment or happiness it happens within flows of information that are sustainable (Haverkamp, 2012, 2018b, 2018a). Let us look at an example where this is not the case:

Peter talks to Jane. He tells her that he really believes in the common business venture of starting a steak restaurant. The more he talks about what this may grow into the future and how he feels this will be important to him also in the future, the more strenuous it becomes. The following days he reluctantly answers Jane's calls. When he opens a new account for the business at the bank, he feels anxious.

Peter may not even know himself that he would rather start a vegetarian restaurant. However, once he observes his communication patterns with himself and others, it very likely would become clear to him that something is out of sync. In the moment, when he talks to Jane, it may not become clear to him, because he thinks about a specific content rather than how the content is being communicated. However, by observing how he communicates a specific content he can gain clarity and insight into the basic parameters of needs, values and aspirations (Haverkamp, 2018b, 2018f).

The meaning we see and share in the world depends on the exchange of information, both with ourselves and with the environment. One can be happy in solitude, but this happiness depends on how one communicates with oneself and interacts with the living world around. Most people need companionship on a regular basis, because they need more varied communication and a at least a certain minimum level of interactions with others to create and maintain meaning. Connectedness can thus take many forms, and it is important to find the right communication and interaction styles and intensities which lead to a high level of satisfaction, contentment and happiness.

Because connectedness offers more insight into the own needs, values and aspirations, it also helps to stabilize the own perception of them and the perception of those in others, which can contribute to a greater sense of stability within oneself and with the world. Thus, all opportunities to connect more deeply with another human being can further the sense of stability in the world. When the ability

to connect with others in a meaningful way is impaired, the world is often a more frightening place. 'Meaningfulness' is an important criterion. For example, an inability to be intimate on a deeper level often causes those affected by it to try to compensate with more sex with more partners. However, sex without a deeper connection is usually not fulfilling and leads to a hunger which is not stilled no matter how often one tries.

Alignment

Connections need to align with the basic parameters, the needs values and aspirations. Otherwise the connection is not sustainable over the long-term. This does not mean that people in a relationship have to have the same basic parameters, but it requires that the connection aligns with them. As we have connections with many different people in different types of relationships, each connection has to have mutual benefits on a deeper level to be sustainable. 'Deeper' simply means that is not solely transaction based, such as the temporary connection between a customer and a shop assistant; the relationship has to have potential benefit over time to be sustainable, which goes beyond the benefit of a momentary transaction.

Communication that serves to test and experiment with the potential alignment between partners can be likened to a trial dance to see if sharing a rhythm is possible. This may also explain why the choice of communication patterns and styles in a dating situation may be more important than the actual content that is being talked about. The alignment manifests itself when new meaning is created.

Knowledge and Focus

A connection flourishes if there is some knowledge in each partner of the own needs and values to at least know what does not work for them. While explicit knowledge grows through awareness, an implicit knowledge which comes from experience is enough. There is thus a positive cycle between communication which delivers greater insight into needs, values and aspirations, and the latter, which help maintain and deepen the connection. Having a greater understanding of the own basic parameters and the communication patterns one uses with oneself and others is the key towards a better connectedness with oneself and with others (Haverkamp, 2010a). Communication-Focused Therapy (CFT), as developed by the author offers several approaches (Haverkamp, 2010b, 2017a) Finding meaning in things leads to greater happiness, and the basic parameters are ways to find and

communicate what is meaningful. This requires doing what feels important, which can be a radically new way of doing things.

Connecting Across Time

Can we connect with someone we never met because they lived hundreds of years ago or with someone who is not present anymore? If that person leaves information, which we all do, we can connect. As mentioned, connectedness is a feeling that facilitates and is the result of the exchange of meaningful information. And wherever there is meaningful information, we can transform it in us and create new information from it. We do it all the time with a person who is in front of us. We cannot get immediate feedback to something we say from a person that is not present, but our mind can take the available information and create something new.

Connecting the Inside and the Outside

Sustainable happiness is when we are connected to the inside and outside worlds, when we can communicate freely within both. When an organization strives to be optimally adapted to itself and the environment, when it allows itself to be changed by it and to change it in beneficial ways, it can induce positive feelings and productivity. Fears, however, can be a significant hindrance.

Happiness does not require great activity. Even sitting in one's chair at home can bring about happiness, when the feeling of connectedness with oneself and the world around is present. Happiness and the flow of meaningful information are linked. Happiness as an emotion is an indicator of how we process information, of how we think. Taking a step back and 'observing' how one processes information on the inside (thinks and feels) and how one processes information on the outside (interacts with others) leads to greater connectedness and usually also higher satisfaction in life. Connectedness helps to optimize how we arrange our surroundings and ourselves in these surroundings.



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