

Book Review



Floyd, K. (2019). *Affectionate Communication in Close Relationships*. Cambridge University Press. 283 pp. ISBN-13: 978-1108470582

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DOI: 10.1177/0261927X20904124

As someone who has spent his academic career studying affection, I was excited to be asked to review this book. This new book is a natural follow-up to the author's earlier book, *Communicating Affection: Interpersonal Behavior and Social Context* (Floyd, 2006). Before discussing the work, readers unfamiliar with Floyd's research should know that he has published numerous studies and books on this topic. As the book's biography explains, Floyd "has written fifteen books and more than a hundred scientific papers and book chapters on the topics of affection, emotion, family communication, nonverbal behavior, and health." Given his prolific work, it is only natural that Google Scholar reports that his work has been cited nearly 10,000 times. Consequently, this book on affection is authored by a very qualified expert on the topic.

This 283-page comprehensive book aims "to summarize and critique the existing body of theoretic and empirical work on affectionate communication, and to acknowledge some of the questions about affection and affectionate behavior that have yet to be addressed" (p. 7). The book is organized through 10 chapters that orient readers to affection through a beginning introduction and discussion and evaluation of relevant theories. The author reviews theories that speak to affection, including his own Affection Exchange Theory (Floyd, 2006). The text transitions to discuss research exploring the encoding and decoding of affectionate messages. Next, the author reviews connections to mental and physical health. Upon completion of this text, I am once again struck by the power of affection and its importance in various relationships.

For researchers who explore language and social psychological processes, this book naturally aligns with those research interests. As Floyd points out early on, "The primary focus of this text is on the communication of affection, or the behaviors through which the experience of affection is presented" (p. 5). Naturally then, the focus on "affectionate communication" clearly underscores an interest in verbal and nonverbal messages. Moreover, and relative to those with interests in

internal psychological processes, the author points out that “affectionate communication is defined herein as encompassing those behaviors that portray or present the internal experience of affection, whether accurately or not” (p. 5). Consequently, this book focuses on language, via affectionate communication, and psychology, via the degree to which people experience feelings of affection.

There is much to like about this book. First, it is comprehensive and synthesizes research across various disciplines. The references include journals in psychology, communication, medicine, criminal justice, and, naturally, this journal. Second, the book offers both breadth and depth in summarizing specific studies as well as bodies of research. Importantly, the text is fair in the presentation of research, discussing specific findings but also fairly representing the limitations that should be considered when interpreting those findings.

Third, and perhaps my favorite part of the book, is the text’s discussion of how and why affection is beneficial. The author spends two chapters reviewing studies connecting affection to physical and mental health. An important underlying argument presented, based on this work, is “the possibility that sharing affection *is good for us*” (p. 150). Naturally, then, the author discusses possibilities through which manipulating affection levels might be considered a relational or therapeutic intervention.

The text concludes with an important discussion of how affection might be problematic. This is consistent with a theme throughout Floyd’s work, noting the possibility that affection has “risk” (p. 195). He frames this from a Dark Side approach (e.g., Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007), and parts of the risk discussion reminded me of Duck and VanderVoort’s (2002) discussion of (in)appropriate behavior in (in)appropriate relationships. That is, some risks presented, such as too much affection or the risk of inaccurate interpretation of an affectionate message might be explained by perceptions of the appropriateness of the behavior within the specific relationship.

At the conclusion, Floyd notes that “research on affectionate communication is indeed eclectic in terms of its focus, its methodology, and its theoretic underpinnings” (p. 211). This text provides a comprehensive overview of that research, as well as an impressive overview of novel research designs. Researchers and practitioners interested in affection, language, close relationships, and emotional processes would find this book to be of great interest.

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Author Biography

Sean M. Horan (PhD, West Virginia University) is Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Communication at Fairfield University. His research primarily explores how people use affection to lie (*deceptive affection*) and communication surrounding workplace romance.