

Book reviews

Floyd, K. (2006). *Communicating affection: Interpersonal behavior and social context*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 234 pp. ISBN 13: 9780521832052; ISBN 10: 0521832055 (hardback), \$80.00.

Reviewed by: Valerie Manusov, Department of Communication, University of Washington, USA.

I am feeling good. Really good. And now I know why.

I just spent a half hour on the couch with my 9 year old son, cuddling, laughing, and occasionally telling one another just how much we love the other. That is, I had 30 glorious minutes of sending and receiving affection. And I had the benefit of having read Kory Floyd's comprehensive account on communicated affection to help me understand why expressing real affection works the ways it does.

In this monograph, Floyd presents a clear, precise, and fully persuasive discussion of (1) what we know, (2) what we think we know, and (3) what we still need to understand about the process of communicating affection. Specifically, Floyd uses his own commitment to bioevolutionary approaches to underlay a set of well-detailed and digestible explanations of why it feels good – most of the time – to both be the recipient and the provider of affectionate cues (e.g., declarations of positive feelings, touch, smiling, personal idioms). Many of these claims are based on the array of studies that Floyd and his colleagues have conducted over many years, giving him a level of expertise in this area that few others could possibly have. At the same time, he does not privilege his own data over others. This book bridges research conducted from scholars in a range of disciplines (e.g., women's studies, neuroscience, psychology) that contribute to our knowledge about this vital relational function.

Notably, Floyd takes great care to make accurate claims about communicating affection. When the data are available, he presents a clear picture of what conclusions can be drawn with strong certainty about affectionate communication (i.e., he tells us what is known). For instance, Floyd states that 'There is a "core" set of behaviors that people tend to decode as expressions of liking or affection. These behaviors tend to be those that show interest in, and attraction toward, the recipient' (p. 56) and 'in every case, the amount of affection people typically expressed to others was associated with individual and social benefits' (p. 93). Each of these knowledge claims comes from his review of the available evidence. He also clarifies when the data suggest but do not yet provide a complete accounting of other propositions (i.e., he tells us what we *think* we know). This type of information includes claims such as these: '[T]hese findings are the first to demonstrate that affectionate, warm contact between romantic partners increases plasma levels of oxytocin [a peptide hormone that is produced by the hypothalamus ... [that] promotes a feeling of calmness, pleasantness, and mild euphoria p. 105], at least for women' (p. 107). In each claim, Floyd states carefully the ways in which the data can – and cannot – be generalized. Finally, he shows us clearly, through bold print and research questions, what is still unknown in the larger quest for understanding the nature of human affection (i.e., what we still need to understand). Sample questions include, 'When is the initial

expression of affection a negative turning point, as opposed to a positive one' (p. 123) and 'What factors influence people's decisions to convey affection through written versus spoken means?' (p. 32), each of which provokes an array of opportunities for researchers engaged in this area. Overall, the precision with which he discusses extant research is exemplary, as is his commitment to using this volume to encourage more research.

Although the focus of this book is, in many ways, on conclusions based in particular studies, the other obvious contribution is Floyd's presentation of a theory that helps coalesce and explain this large set of research. The theory he has been developing, in this work and previously, is presented vis-à-vis other relational theories that have been used – although not typically created for – explaining affection expressions. Among other postulates, his affection exchange theory (AET), proposes that (1) the need and capacity for affection are inborn, (2) affectionate feelings and affectionate expressions are distinct experiences, and (3) humans vary in their optimal tolerances for affection and affectionate behavior. As can be seen, these propositions cross disciplinary interests, providing explanations relevant to both biologically- and socially-centered scientists. Bridging these interests, the postulates he presents encompass a solid and complex assessment of what is involved in giving and receiving affection across relationships.

Given this book's heuristic value, it is bound to lead more relational researchers to study aspects of affection. As such, it is likely that Floyd will need to revise the book within a few years. If he does, I would like to see him address not just risks associated with giving and receiving affection, as he discusses in Chapter 6, but also the real social problems created by unwanted or unreciprocated affectionate behavior. For example, sexual harassment is a direct result of unwanted affection and/or diverse interpretations of behavior as friendly/sexual, and some of the work that Floyd describes can speak to minimizing the occurrence of such behavior. I would also urge him to target the book solely to graduate students, researchers, and practitioners and not to upper level undergraduates. To do so, some of the examples that reference hypothetical relationships could be removed. Neither of these suggestions takes away from the current volume, one that both sits proudly on my shelf and stays prominently in my mind and heart as I engage with my son, and others, in myriad affectionate ways.

Connor, M. E., & White, J. L. (Eds). (2006). *Black fathers: An invisible presence in America*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. 277 pages. ISBN 0805845100 (paperback), \$29.95.

Reviewed by: Glenn I. Roisman, Department of Psychology, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA.

This important volume revisits the widespread characterization of Black fathers as 'deadbeat dads.' Resisting this caricature, the authors published in this edited book present evidence for successful African American fathering, depicted most effectively in the provocative stories told by Black fathers, their children, and the scholars who have studied these vital relationships. An accessible read containing many powerful, personal stories of children being lifted up through their relationships with male figures in the African American community (and in some cases rising above more malevolent paternal experiences), the chapters in this volume offer a rarely articulated alternative narrative to the more typical depiction of Black fathers as violent, unavailable, or both. Although few of the chapters in this book ignore the reality that paternal absenteeism is an especially serious problem faced by Black families, the authors of this volume make a strong case that the failure to describe, depict, and respectfully honor successful African American fathers has not only convinced much of the public that such individuals do not exist (hence their 'invisibility' in America) but also represents a missed opportunity for social scientists and policy makers to identify the personal and contextual resources that promote and sustain effective fathering in the context of adversity.