

The Modern Breakup

By Sean Owsley





The notion of heroes and villains has jumped straight out of the comics and into our everyday lives. In many relationships, it becomes easy to point the finger and label someone as the cause

of some great tension or conflict, in other words, a villain. However, upon closer examination of any situation, that is not always true. Take for example the relationship between Tom and Summer in the movie *(500) Days of Summer*, which offers a fictionalized, but true-to-life example of how a contemporary relationship falls apart. *(500) Days of Summer*, as the narrator points out is a story of boy meets girl. However, the narrator ends his opening monologue by saying that the film's story is not a love story. Instead, the film is about a break up between two contemporary characters and demonstrates how the break up occurred by looking at the entire relationship from start to finish. *(500) Days of Summer* will be used within this study because it provides an arguably true-to-life example of how a contemporary break up occurs. More importantly, the film shows how a break up is not one-sided. Rather, it is because of a miscommunication and imbalance of relational dialectics. This study analyzes *(500) Days of Summer* through the theoretical lens of relational dialectics theory to see how miscommunication and relational dialectic imbalance, in many romantic, heterosexual relationships cause break ups.

Relational dialectics theory (RDT) focuses on relationships and the exchanges that occur within them. It also addresses how contradictions/tensions are constant within relationships no matter the circumstance. Em Griffin (2009), author of *A First Look at Communication Theory*, offers a summary on how RDT views the world and offers as a good starting point for understanding the theory. To paraphrase Griffin (2009), a person's social life consists of a multitude of twisting and turning contradictions, never-ending interactions between both opposing and contradictory tendencies that include integration-separation, stability-change, and expression-nonexpression. Strong, long lasting relationships are built

through dialogue, which is seen as an aesthetic accomplishment that creates brief and fleeting moments of unity through a strong respect for the varying voices (Griffin, 2009, pp. A-2). By using relational dialectics theory, this study aims to clarify the reasoning behind a break within many romantic, heterosexual relationships. Instead of a "villain," there exists natural tensions between the three dialectics that affect relationships: integration-separation, stability-change, and expression-nonexpression. These three dialectics are divided between either internal or external dialectics. Internal dialectics are viewed as ongoing tensions played out within a relationship. On the other hand, external dialectics are the ongoing tensions between a couple and their community (Baxter & Montgomery, 2009). Unchecked miscommunication regarding these tensions causes people to break away from each other. These tensions, as explored by the theory, are naturally occurring within a relationship and should not be viewed as a major problem within a relationship. The theory also provides information on the idea of dialectical flux and the fact that quality relationships are constructed through dialogue. Understanding this notion helps people understand that when developing and sustaining a relationship, it is bound to be an unpredictable and indeterminate process (Baxter & Montgomery, 2009). For this study, internal dialectics will be observed more so than external dialectics because the film is centered on Tom and Summer's relationship and remains detached from any external dialectics that would play a role in their relationship. Within this study the contemporary breakup as reflected by the movie *(500) Days of Summer* will be examined under the lens of relational dialectics theory to explore how breakups occur in many romantic, heterosexual relationships. The following Literature Review will further examine what critics and scholars have said about the movie *(500) Days of Summer*, how breakups can occur, and how other communication theorists have used relational dialectics theory.

In *(500) Days of Summer* Tom—a hopeless romantic—meets Summer—a realist when it comes to relationships and love—and starts to believe that she is the "one" he is meant to be with for the rest of this life. However, Summer does not share this belief and actually scoffs at the idea of love. However, the two still end up dating and eventually breaking up. The film moves through both connected and random instances within Tom and Summer's relationship to tell the complete story of how they broke up. *(500) Days of Summer* offers a

fresh insight into the inner workings of contemporary relationships while at the same time paying homage to its predecessors in the romantic comedy genre of movies. Being a relatively new movie there are no scholarly studies of *(500) Days of Summer*. Therefore, a number of critic reviews written about the movie will be explored, along with reviews about movies that are parallel to *(500) Days of Summer* such as *Annie Hall* and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. At the same time, the study will be taking a closer look at how the movie both expresses and relates to breakups within contemporary relationships. Relational dialectics theory will also be examined by investigating how other researchers have applied this theory as well as looking at their critique of the theory as a whole.

Originating as the kind of underdog independent film that even the creators have admitted to being a bit shy and/or embarrassed about in their commentary to the film (Webb 2009), *(500) Days of Summer* distinguishes itself from the common romantic comedy genre to provide us with a simple truth. Life does not need to be portrayed as a fantasy. The majority of critics have enjoyed *(500) Days of Summer*, and this fact is evident within their reviews. The critics offer insights into how *(500) Days of Summer* portrays not only a true-to-life relationship but also provides an example of relationships in today's society. One of the most thought provoking statements about the movie, as far as understanding what makes it so special and how it portrays a true-to-life relationship, comes from Washington Post writer Desson Thomson (2009):

Finally, a romance that understands we mark our lives by our scrapes with love, and our defeats, rather than simply white-wedding-cake success. A movie that sidesteps the Pollyanna pornography of *Happily Ever After*. That dives headlong into the "Any Given Sunday" sport of normal heartbreak. No wonder we feel giddy and flushed (Thomson 2009)

Thomson (2009) goes on to offer more connections as to how the movie portrays what real people do when they are either in a relationship or falling out of a relationship. The main example of this that Thomson (2009) uses is the movie's way of presenting the days of Tom and Summer's relationship. Instead of just moving in the traditional linear fashion that is so common in romantic comedies the movie skips back and forth between relating events according to

their importance to the story and Tom's path towards letting go of his relationship. Thomson (2009) ends his review by once again reflecting on how realistic *(500) Days of Summer* is compared to other romantic comedies. He argues that the old fashioned method of portraying romance in movies has no real application to our lives but that *(500) Days of Summer* actually manages to travel down a familiar romantic trail that the majority of us have walked before. *(500) Days of Summer* offers more than just a look into true-to-life relationships, it also offers a look at love. This idea may seem like it would be straightforward but for anyone who has dealt with love knows that is never the case. A. O. Scott (2009), writer for The New York Times, sums up what *(500) Days of Summer* depicts in terms of love, in that it is "a story about how love can be confusing, contingent and asymmetrical, and about how love can fail" (Scott 2009).

Where Thomson (2009) and Scott (2009) bask in the closeness to reality that *(500) Days of Summer* portrays other critics address at what the film says about relationships today. Chicago Tribune writer Jason Travis (2009) compares *(500) Days of Summer* to other cinematic examples of women with the upper hand in a relationship. Two of these films are *Annie Hall* and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. Travis (2009) outlines how sometimes in relationships women are the ones who have established control not the men, as is often perceived. By trimming *(500) Days of Summer's* main theme down to, "Tom falls for Summer. He's a hopeless romantic, she doesn't believe in true love" (Travis 2009), Travis allows his readers to see the connections to the other films he mentions. With *Annie Hall*, he states that the lead female role does have instant attraction to the male lead but outgrows him and walks away. Describing *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, Travis states that the female lead wipes her memories of the male lead because she is over him; the male lead tries to do the same but cannot really let her go. All three of these brief synopses say the same thing, that the woman is the one who ends the relationship and thus leaves the poor sap of a man to feel all alone and miserable for some duration of the movie.

Further review of *Annie Hall* and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, reveals more parallels to *(500) Days of Summer*. For instance, it appears as though all three male leads experience a relationship that not only tests what they know about themselves, but also makes them reflect on why that

relationship was important to them and what they needed to learn from that experience. The three movies also portray couples that are dysfunctional at best, yet the movies still manage to show how worthwhile that relationship can be to both people involved. Other critics have also referenced *Annie Hall* in their reviews of *(500) Days of Summer*. For instance, Claudia Puig (2009) of USA Today states, "Much like *Annie Hall* did for a previous generation, *(500) Days of Summer* may be the movie that best captures a contemporary romantic sensibility." What is meant by contemporary romantic sensibility is that people of today are able to relate to the romance of Tom and Summer as it reflects to their own experiences. Puig's (2009) main point is that *(500) Days of Summer* breaks away from the conventional romantic comedy scheme while at the same time allowing a whole new generation of people to witness contemporary romantic sensibility at its best. The dissolution of a relationship serves as a connection between the three movies and adds to their overall effectiveness in portraying true-to-life break-ups, and the most recent of the three, *(500) Days of Summer*, allows one to see how breakups occur in a modern day setting. In contrast, *Annie Hall* was set in the 1970's which was geared towards an entirely different generation, and mainly focused on how the main character's relationship fell apart. While *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* is more recent than *Annie Hall*, it does not deal with the same maintenance issues as *(500) Days of Summer* but instead portrays the rebuilding of relationships. *(500) Days of Summer* is the best film for this study because unlike *Annie Hall* and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, *(500) Days of Summer* depicts a contemporary relationship and how difficult it can be to maintain a relationship in the current era. With that in mind, it is necessary to explore breakups in order to gain an understanding of why they occur.

Breakups

Breakups are a central part of relationships and it is important to understand how they occur to know how they are a part of relational dialectics. Breakups, like most things are multifaceted: one cannot simply look at a breakup for brief period of time and know every reason as to why it occurred. It is crucial to understand the the determinants and effects of breakups in order to comprehend relationships.

To start off, attraction serves as a part of what brings people

together in a relationship and is also believed to be an initiator of a breakup. This idea is explored by Diane H. Felmlee (2001), who believes that what attracts us to someone also serves to drive us away from them. These are considered fatal attractions. Felmlee (2001) argues:

There is a link between these seemingly disparate processes of romantic attraction and disenchantment. Like a moth to a flame, people can be drawn to the very aspects of another person that they eventually find troublesome. "Fatal attraction" is one term for this type of disenchantment, where "fatal" is defined as "prophetic" or "foretelling a sequence" rather than deadly; this sequence begins with attraction to a partner quality and ends in disillusionment with that quality (263)

Felmlee (2001) goes on to say that the fatal attractions occur in both dating relationships and marriages. Some of the examples she provides include a woman who is attracted to a man who is laid back but is then seen as being constantly late. The other example used is of a man being attracted to a woman's shyness but then viewing that same shyness as being too insecure (Felmlee D. H., 2001, p. 263). To support her thesis Felmlee (2001) surveyed 125 dating persons and found that 44 percent of those individuals experienced fatal attractions. She also found that one-third of her respondents saw similarities between characteristics that someone is attracted to and rejected by (Felmlee D. H., 2001, p. 263). While fatal attractions may serve as a determinate of a breakup it is not the only factor.

Diane Felmlee, Susan Sprecher and Edward Bassin (1990) performed a study to explore other determinants of breakups in relationships and found that several variables serve as predictors for the rate at which a relationship is terminated. To achieve this Felmlee, Sprecher and Bassin (1990) examined "how measures of different factors affected the rate at which a relationship changed from intact to broken up" (Felmlee et al, 1990, p. 15). As a result, variables such as comparison level for alternatives, amount of time spent together, dissimilarity in race, support from a partner's social network and the overall duration of the relationship were determined as predictors for when a relationship would terminate. In addition, each of these variables suggests that they stemmed from theories in social exchange, similarity and social networking to help contribute to an explanation

behind breakups (Felmlee et al, 1990, p. 15, 26-28).

In addition to the determinants of a breakup, it is also important to explore some of the effects of a breakup. One effect in particular is the result of having stronger maintenance strategies within a new relationship than one did in the previous relationship. Colleen Hlywa and Katheryn Maguire (2008) performed an investigation that helps to provide why instances like this occur. They tested whether or not attachment style has anything to do with a person's desire to maintain a friendship after a breakup. For their research, they surveyed 228 college students and found that there is no real connection between attachment style and maintenance strategies but did discover that "respondents did engage in more maintenance strategies with a current romantic partner than a post-dissolutional friend" (Hlywa & Maguire, 2008, p. 1). While understanding the end of a relationship is important, one needs a further understanding of how relationships work and what is being said about relationships. To comprehend this, the lens of relational dialectics theory should be applied.

Relational dialectics theory

One of the authors accredited for relational dialectics theory in Em Griffin's book (2009), *A First Look at Communication Theory*, Leslie Baxter (2004) provides not only her history with relational dialectics theory but also the history and progression of the theory itself in her article *A Tale of Two Voices: Relational Dialectics Theory*. In chronological order, Baxter moves through her life experiences that played into her development of RDT, such as her experiences in graduate school where her desire to study opposition was first planted by studying the opposite of relationship formation: relationship endings. One of Baxter's (2004) main "morals," (as she puts it) to take away from her tale, is to understand the evolution of relational dialectics theory from first-generation to second-generation relational dialectics:

First-generation relational dialectics positioned the concept of contradiction at the centerpiece of the theory with other dialogic elements occupying a more muted background. In contrast, second-generation relational dialectics positions the several meanings of "dialogue" with more or less equal footing — dialogue as the centripetal-centrifugal flux, dialogue as utterance, dialogue as aesthetic moment, dialogue

as a critical sensibility. (188)

Baxter also addresses the future of RDT by stating, "the theory itself needs a firmer empirical base in talk between relating parties...future work needs to construct the narrative tale of "multiple voices" in centrifugal-centripetal flux...and future research needs to study discourse through time, studying shifts and transformations in the dialogue of discursive voices" (Baxter L. A., 2004, p. 189). A key fact that sticks out in Baxter's "morals" is that relational dialectics changes gradually, it is unpredictable. The last idea which Baxter presents is that "theory growing takes place in the utterances between scholars, not in the actions of autonomous scholars" (Baxter L. A., 2004, p. 190). While the history and development of the theory are important, it is also important to look at how this theory has been used in previous studies.

By looking through the lens of relational dialectics theory one can get a better understanding of breakups and how they occur. The key thought behind how breakups occur is that there is a need for autonomy and connection within relationships to the point where autonomy and connection are viewed as unified oppositions. This implies that if too much time is spent together then a loss of autonomy and individuality occurs and in contrast, separation puts a limit on connection and can cause harm to a relationship (Sahlstein & Dun 2008). Sahlstein and Dun's (2008) study focuses on autonomy and connection to explore why breakups occur. Sahlstein and Dun accomplish this by setting out to answer two questions. First, how do couples talk about their management of autonomy-connection prior to breakup? Second, how do relational partners describe their breakup as a matter of autonomy-connection struggle (Sahlstein & Dun, 2008)? While the study does have something to say about relationships and break-ups, it also provides another definition in explaining relational dialectics theory:

According to this approach, various contradictions are at play in relational life. A contradiction is the "dynamic interplay between unified oppositions." In particular, individuals in personal relationships have consistently reported experiencing a contradiction between their simultaneous need for separation and integration. This contradiction is central during relational termination, as this process is inherently a change from a particular kind of connection to autonomy. (38)

Sahlstein and Dun (2008) surveyed ninety college students that were currently in romantic relationships and asked them to record a discussion of how they manage the autonomy-connection dialectic. The results of this study yielded that eight couples of the original ninety students said that issues with the management of autonomy-connection was part of the termination of their relationship. The two main forms of contradictions that were reflected were antagonistic and non-antagonistic (Sahlstein & Dun, 2008). The non-antagonistic struggles are when partners have problems managing dialectics. In contrast, the antagonistic struggles are based on contradiction, in which each person is aligned with a different pole of contradiction. In other words, people have different views, stances or opinions on arguments and sometimes because of these differences, someone is seen as being the antagonist or "villain." This fact is important because this form of contradiction can also be interpreted as a representation of a villain by either side of the relationship. Understanding this idea is key in analyzing *(500) Days of Summer* with relational dialectics theory, as it dissects all of the tensions displayed within the movie.

Thus far *(500) Days of Summer*, breakups, and relational dialectics theory have been reviewed, leaving one main question which remains to be answered: how are *(500) Days of Summer* and relational dialectics theory connected? More importantly, by looking through the lens of RDT, what can be said about modern breakups and how does this challenge the antagonistic view of romantic breakups? This study explores the natural tensions of a contemporary relationship while at the same time examining determinates and effects of a breakup. By observing *(500) Days of Summer* through the lens of relational dialectics theory these tensions, determinates, and effects of a breakup become more clear.

After reviewing the literature the foundation is laid to explore how the theory of relational dialectics and the related concepts of antagonistic struggles and fatal attractions apply to Tom and Summer's contemporary true-to-life breakup. The following analysis explores how three internal dialectics, antagonistic struggles and the notion of fatal attraction relate to Tom and Summer's relationship. To begin, a closer look at the relationship between Tom and Summer of *(500) Days of Summer* is taken while applying the lens of RDT, allowing one to view the key elements of a miscommunication.

tion and imbalance of relational dialectics within Tom and Summer's relationship. As the movie progresses through the story of Tom and Summer, both parties appear to be happy within their relationship. However, the film mainly reveals the relationship through Tom's perspective. As a result, at the beginning of the movie Summer appears to be a kind of villain or antagonist for breaking up with Tom. But, as the movie progresses and nears the end, Tom is beginning to move on with his life and is advised by his younger sister to play through his memories again and pay attention to all the bad parts of his relationship with Summer that he had been ignoring for the majority of the movie. Once Tom is able to realize this, he is able to completely move on with his life and realize that there is always another day and another person to meet and fall in love with.

By examining Tom and Summer's relationship one can see examples of how the internal dialectics of the three relational dialects affect their relationship. These internal dialectics include connectedness-separation, certainty-uncertainty and openness-closedness. As stated earlier, internal dialectics will be explored more so than the external because they apply more to Tom and Summer's relationship due to the fact that the movie is focused primarily on them and not their interactions with the people around them and society for that matter. In general, a primary problem that can be observed in Tom and Summer's relationship is their lack of ability to balance connectedness-separation. Tom and Summer's problem with balancing connectedness-separation has much to do with the fact that, according to Baxter & Montgomery, "no relationship can exist by definition unless the parties sacrifice some individual autonomy. However, too much connection paradoxically destroys the relationship because the individual identities become lost" (Baxter & Montgomery, 2009, p. 157). In the film, as soon as Tom tries to define his relationship with Summer and put a label on it everything about their relationship starts to progress more towards the disintegration of the relationship. In other words, when Tom tries to get closer to Summer, because he is convinced that he is in love with her, he makes her question if she is really in love with him. Summer then begins to worry that if something does not happen to change their relationship, she is just going to be miserable and end up hurting Tom. While it is evident that connectedness-separation problems do exist within Tom and Summer's relationship, there is not much to be said about their own individual autonomy—otherwise known as personal freedom—while they are together, main-

ly because the movie focuses more on Tom's point of view and his journey towards recovery from the heartache. His journey, however, does show the re-establishment of his autonomy, as he begins to live again without worrying about Summer. It is this progression shows how beneficial it was for him to be in a relationship with Summer.

The problems associated with connectedness-separation is not uncommon. As mentioned above, Tom and Summer's relationship difficulties relate to Sahlstein and Dun's (2008) study that focuses on autonomy and connection to figure out why break-ups occur in relationships. The results did show that couples labeled connectedness and autonomy as a factor in explaining why they broke up. It also explored the antagonistic form of contradiction, in which each person is aligned with a different pole of contradiction (Sahlstein & Dun, 2008). The antagonistic form of contradiction can be seen as reason to explain how the notion of a villain occurs and seeing as each person is aligned with a different pole of contradiction it is highly possible that people will disagree at some point. Once the relationship ends it is likely that one person will be held responsible in the other individual's mind and be labeled as a villain. However, seeing as the antagonism is coming from both sides of the relationship, one person cannot be held entirely responsible for the dissolution of the relationship. Instead, it is due to both parties lack of communication and inability to balance their relational dialectic tensions that brought about a break up.

Tom's urge to define the status of their relationship is also linked to two other internal relational dialectics, certainty-uncertainty and openness-closedness. Tom and Summer experience problems once Tom seeks to define their relationship and have a bit of certainty, an example of certainty-uncertainty. Summer is conflicted with the uncertainty as to whether or not she feels the same as Tom feels about her. Part of what adds to this tension is that before Tom and Summer started dating, it was made apparent that Summer does not believe in love but Tom does. To further support this point, when Tom and Summer have a chance last meeting Summer finally tells Tom the primary reason that lead to their break up:

Tom: You never wanted to be anybody's girlfriend and now you're somebody's wife.

Summer: It surprised me too.

Tom: I don't think I'll ever understand that. I mean it doesn't make sense.

Summer: It just happened.

Tom: Right, but that's what I don't understand. What just happened?

Summer: I just..I just woke up one day and I knew.

Tom: Knew what?

Summer: What I was never sure of with you. (Webb 2009)

It is clear that uncertainty played a part in their break up. Summer, someone who did not believe in love, was uncertain about how she truly felt about Tom. Even though she knew she was happy, she could not work through the tension and the relationship suffered. Tom, on the other hand believed in love and was certain that he loved Summer. He also struggled with trying to establish certainty in the relationship because he wanted to know that when he woke up in the morning that Summer was still going to feel the same way about him as she did the night before. As a result of this, Tom has difficulty understanding what Summer was experiencing internally. In short, Tom was certain that he loved Summer and Summer was uncertain that she loved Tom. The tension between both uncertainty and certainty eventually pushed the two apart

The final dialectic, openness-closedness, differs from the others in relation to Tom and Summer in that the tension caused by it is the catalyst of all of the other tensions. In a scene where Tom and Summer are talking in her apartment for the first time, the narrator of the movie is quick to point out that when Tom finally gets to see Summer's inner sanctum, that few have ever been to, Tom begins to feel as though Summer's thick walls have finally begun to dissolve. This can be interpreted as Summer becoming more open and intimate with Tom. However, when Summer talks to Tom about her dreams and fears, Tom makes himself believe that because he is hearing this information and because Summer states that she has never told anyone her secrets that he is not just anyone but someone truly special to her. However, the irony of the exchange is that it spurs Tom to try and define what

exactly his relationship with Summer is: are they couple or are they just friends with benefits? Due to the fact that Tom and Summer's relationship has become more intimate at this point, Tom pushes to establish certainty and connectedness within the relationship, but fails to realize Summer's uncertainty, separation, and closedness. Overall, the first scene in Summer's apartment can be viewed as containing what is described as a part of second generation dialectics: constitutive dialogue. This is, this scene and dialogue cause waves of changes in Tom and Summer's relationship that end up generating tension until the relationship completely disintegrates. Finally, of the other determinates that can play into a breakup, fatal attraction is apparent within *(500) Days of Summer*. The movie has two different scenes where Tom goes through a list attributes and features that he deems as good qualities that he "loves about Summer." However, those same qualities when combined with his animosity toward Summer become attributes that he finds to be annoying and unattractive. Tom's own example validates that the theory of fatal attraction is real, even in the most modern of relationships.

When observing relationships, it is also wise to analyze breakups. The determinants and effects of a breakup take their toll on everyone. This point is evident within *(500) Days of Summer* as the viewer is able to witness firsthand how Tom and Summer's relationship fell apart, as well as the miserable state Tom is put in once he realizes that he is never going to get Summer back in his life. The way the effects of a breakup connect to relational dialectics is that by knowing the forces behind a breakup allows one to see what started the spiral towards dissolution in the first place. In other words, it makes it clear which dialectical tensions played a part in directing a couple to a certain breakup determinate. Determinates and dialectics go hand-in-hand. For example, a problem with a person's connectedness-separations can be seen as someone's decision to breakup with someone because they are not spending enough time with that person. As a whole, break ups are another messy aspect of our lives. Miscommunication and an imbalance of relational dialectics are constant within many romantic relationships. But, with theories such as relational dialects and a variety of studies on break ups, one can begin to work through problems such as miscommunication and dialectical imbalance, thereby allowing one to grow as a person and thus improve their ability to handle relationship.

Conclusion

This study has provided numerous examples to support the argument that miscommunication and relational dialectic imbalance, in many romantic, heterosexual relationships cause break ups by applying the lens of relational dialectics theory to the film *(500) Days of Summer*. Through the analysis given, one can see how the three relational dialectics (integration-separation, stability-change, expression-nonexpression) and their internal dialects (connectedness-separation, certainty-uncertainty and openness-closedness) were evident within Tom and Summer's relationship and how the couple dealt with experiencing the tensions caused by those dialectics. The analysis reveals that it was a lack of balance in regards to the tensions caused the disintegration of their relationship and not that Summer was a robot, as Tom proclaims later in the movie. This study also provides a look at the way break-ups can occur and an effect of a breakup. Furthermore, the main concepts and ideas behind this study are not limited to many romantic, heterosexual relationships. These observations can also have implications for various relationships as well, such as the relationships with friends, family, romantic homosexual relationships and so on.

In closing, relationships do not necessarily fail because something is wrong with either partner. Many relationships fail because most people do not know how to deal with the natural tensions within them. Nevertheless, tensions are viewed as a problem, and problems make it easier for someone to be labeled as a villain—or a cause of those tensions—because most people do not know how to balance out the tensions within relationships. Once people learn how to balance these natural tensions within a relationship, it becomes easier to achieve a long lasting relationship or at least a cleaner breakup. As Em Griffin (2009) states:

I find that many students feel a tremendous sense of relief when they read about relational dialectics. That is because the theory helps them realize that the ongoing tensions they experience with their friend, family member, or romantic partner are an inevitable part of relational life rather than a warning sign that something is terribly wrong with their partner or themselves. (165)

REFERENCES

- Baxter, L. A. (2004). A Tale of Two Voices: Relational Dialectic Theory. *The Journal of Family Communication* , 181-192.
- Baxter, L., & Montgomery, B. (2009). Relational Dialectics. In E. Griffin, *A First Look at Communication Theory* (7th Edition ed., pp. 154-168). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Felmlee, D. H. (2001). From Appealing to Appalling: Disenchantment with a Romantic Partner. *Sociological Perspectives* , 44 (3), 263-280.
- Felmlee, D., Sprecher, S., & Bassin, E. (1990). The Dissolution of Intimate Relationships: A Hazard Model. *Social Psychology Quarterly* , 53 (1), 13-30.
- Griffin, E. (2009). *A First Look at Communication Theory*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Hlywa, C., & Maguire, K. (2008). Attachment Style as a Possible Predictor of Maintenance in Post-Dissolutional Relationships. *Conference Papers - National Communication Association* , 1-28.
- Puig, C. (2009, July 19). Bask in the warmth of delightful '*(500) Days of Summer*'. Retrieved May 6, 2010, from USA TODAY: http://www.usatoday.com/life/movies/reviews/2009-07-16-500-days-of-summer_N.htm
- Sahlstein, E., & Dun, T. (2008). "I wanted Time to Myself and He Wanted to be Together All the Time": Construction Breakups as Managing Autonomy-Connection. *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication*, 37-45.
- Scott, A. O. (2009, July 17th). Movie Review - *(500) Days of Summer* - Love at the Greeting Card Company: Best Wishes on Your Breakup. Retrieved April 20, 2010, from The New York Times: <http://movies.nytimes.com/2009/07/17/movies/17five.html?partner=Rotten%20Tomato&ei=5083>
- Thomson, D. (2009, July 17). *500 Days of Summer* Movie Showtimes and Reviews on washingtonpost.com. Retrieved April 19, 2010, from The Washington Post: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/gog/movies/500-days-of-summer,1156299.html>
- Travis, J. (2009, July 17). '*(500) Days of Summer*': She's just not that into you. Retrieved April 19, 2010, from Chicago Tribune: http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2009-07-17/entertainment/0907160458_1_new-boss-dating-oscar
- Webb, M. (Director). (2009). *(500) Days of Summer* [Motion Picture].