Exploring Relationship Dynamics

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An Introduction to Interpersonal Communication

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PART I

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Communication is a part of every aspect of our lives. Before we jump into specifics, it is important that we have a shared understanding of what we mean by the word communication. For the purpose of this book," communication" is defined as the process of generating meaning by sending and receiving verbal and nonverbal symbols and signs that are influenced by multiple contexts. This definition builds on other definitions of communication that have been rephrased and refined over many years. In fact, since the systematic study of communication began in colleges and universities a little over one hundred years ago, there have been more than 126 published definitions of communication (Dance & Larson, 1976).

While there are five main forms of communication – intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, public, and mass communication – this book focuses on intrapersonal and interpersonal communication in various contexts. We will begin this first chapter by looking at communication models, principles, and competence.

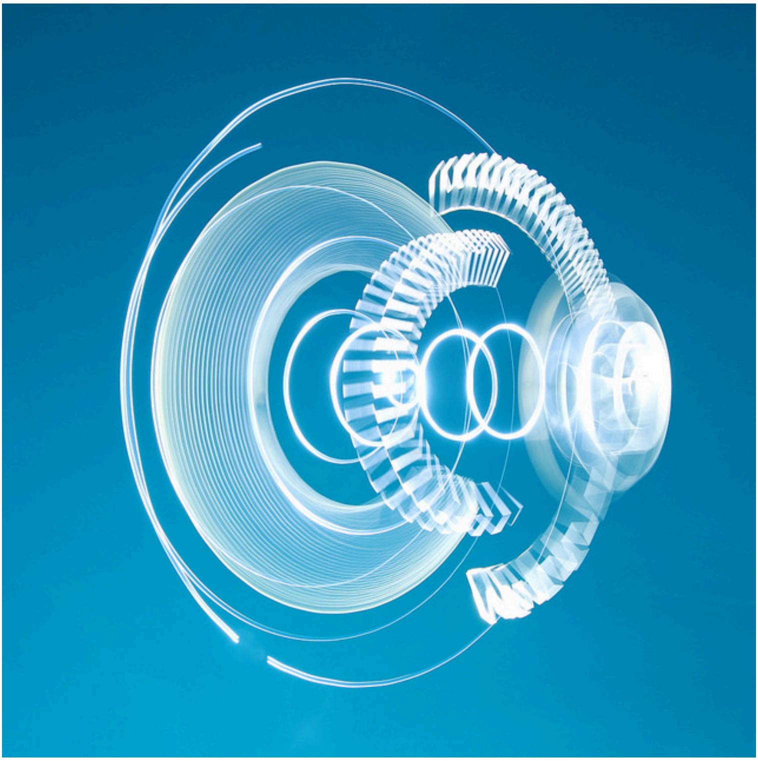
1.1 The Communication Process

Learning Objectives

1. Identify and define the components of the transmission model of communication.
2. Identify and define the components of the interaction model of communication.
3. Identify and define the components of the transaction model of communication.
4. Compare and contrast the three models of communication.
5. Use the transaction model of communication to analyze a recent communication encounter.

Communication is a ***complex process.*** Models of communication provide a visual representation of the various aspects of a communication encounter. Some models explain communication in more detail than others, but even the most complex model still doesn't recreate what we experience in even a moment of a communication encounter. However, these models serve a valuable purpose for students of communication because they allow us to see specific concepts and steps within the process of communication, define communication, and apply communication concepts. When you become aware of how communication functions, you can think more deliberately through your communication encounters, which can help you better prepare for future communication and learn from your previous communication. The three models of communication we will discuss are the transmission, interaction, and transaction models.

Although these models of communication differ, they contain some common elements. The first two models we will discuss, the transmission model and the interaction model, include the following parts: participants, messages, encoding, decoding, and channels. In communication models, the **participants** are the ***senders and/or receivers*** of messages in a communication encounter. The **message** is the ***verbal or nonverbal content*** being conveyed from sender to receiver. For example, when you say "Hello!" to your friend, you are sending a message of greeting that will be received by your friend.



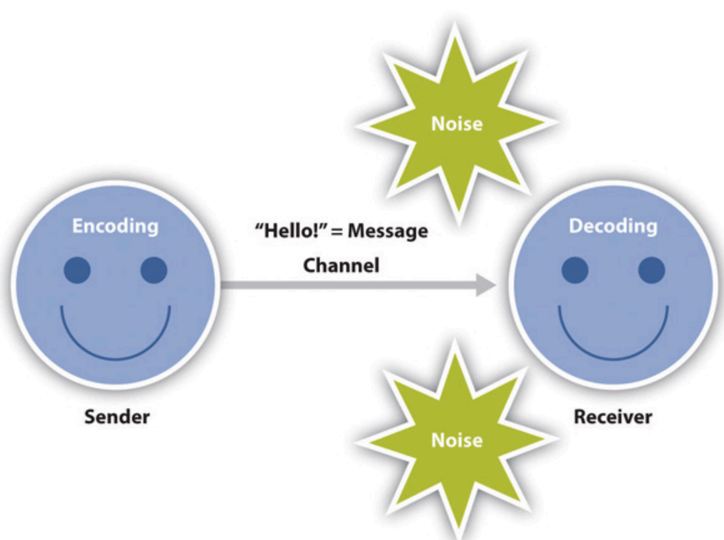
Although models of communication provide a useful blueprint to see how the communication process works, they are not complex enough to capture what communication is like as it is experienced.

The ***internal cognitive process*** that allows participants to send, receive, and understand messages is the **encoding and decoding** process. Encoding is the process of turning thoughts into communication. As we will learn later, the level of conscious thought that goes into encoding messages varies. Decoding is the process of turning communication into thoughts. For example, you may realize you're hungry and encode the following message to send to your roommate: "I'm hungry. Do you want to get pizza tonight?" As your roommate receives the message, he decodes your communication and turns it back into thoughts in order to make meaning out of it. Of course, we don't just communicate verbally—we have various options or **channels** for communication. Encoded messages are sent through a channel, or a ***sensory route*** on which a message travels, to the receiver for decoding. While communication can be sent and received using any sensory route (***sight, smell, touch, taste, or sound***), most communication occurs through visual (sight) and/or auditory (sound) channels. If your roommate has headphones on and is engrossed in a video game, you may need to get his attention by waving your hands before you can ask him about dinner.

Transmission Model of Communication

The **transmission model** of communication describes communication as a ***linear, one-way process*** in which a sender intentionally transmits a message to a receiver (Ellis & McClintock, 1990). This model focuses on the sender and message within a communication encounter. Although the receiver is included in the model, this role is viewed as more of a target or end point rather than part of an ongoing process. We are left to presume that the receiver either successfully receives and understands the message or does not. The scholars who designed this model extended on a linear model proposed by Aristotle centuries before that included a speaker, message, and hearer. They were also influenced by the advent and spread of new communication technologies of the time, such as telegraphy and radio, and you can probably see these technical influences within the model (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). Think of how a radio message is sent from a person in the radio studio to you listening in your car. The sender is the radio announcer who encodes a verbal message that is transmitted by a radio tower through electromagnetic waves (the channel) and eventually reaches your (the receiver's) ears via an antenna and speakers in order to be decoded. The radio announcer doesn't really know if you receive his or her message or not, but if the equipment is working and the channel is free of static, then there is a good chance that the message was successfully received.

Figure 1.1 The Transmission Model of Communication



Since this model is sender and message focused, responsibility is put on the sender to help ensure the message is successfully conveyed. This model emphasizes clarity and effectiveness, but it also acknowledges that there are barriers to effective communication. **Noise** is ***anything that interferes*** with a message being sent between participants in a communication encounter. Even if a speaker sends a clear message, noise may interfere with a message being accurately received and decoded. The transmission model of communication accounts for environmental and semantic noise. **Environmental noise** is any ***physical noise present*** in a communication encounter. Other people talking in a crowded diner could interfere with your ability to transmit a message and have it successfully decoded. While environmental noise interferes with the transmission of the message, **semantic noise** refers to noise that ***occurs in the encoding and decoding process*** when participants ***do not understand a symbol*** (for example, a term or phrase). To use a technical example, FM antennae can't decode AM radio signals and vice versa. Likewise, most French speakers can't decode Swedish and vice versa. Semantic noise can also interfere in communication between people speaking the same language because many words have multiple or unfamiliar meanings.

Although the transmission model may seem simple or even underdeveloped to us today, the creation of this model allowed scholars to examine the communication process in new ways, which eventually led to more complex models and theories of communication that we will discuss more later. This model is not quite rich enough to capture dynamic face-to-face interactions, but there are instances in which communication is one-way and linear, especially computer-mediated communication (CMC). As the following "Getting Plugged In" box explains, CMC is integrated into many aspects of our lives now and has opened up new ways of communicating and brought some new challenges. Think of text messaging, for example. The transmission model of communication is well suited for describing the act of text messaging since the sender isn't sure that the meaning was effectively conveyed or that the message was received at all. Noise can also interfere with the transmission of a text. If you use an abbreviation the receiver doesn't know, or the phone autocorrects to something completely different than you meant, then semantic noise has interfered with the message transmission. I enjoy bargain hunting at thrift stores, so I just recently sent a text to a friend asking if she wanted to go thrifting over the weekend. After she replied with "What?!?" I reviewed my text and saw that my "smart" phone had autocorrected *thrifting* to *thrusting*! You have likely experienced similar problems with text messaging, and a quick Google search for examples of text messages made funny or embarrassing by the autocorrect feature proves that many others do, too.

"Getting Plugged In"

Computer-Mediated Communication

When the first computers were created around World War II and the first e-mails exchanged in the early 1960s, we took the first steps toward a future filled with computer-mediated communication (CMC) (Thurlow, Lengel, & Tomic, 2004). Those early steps turned into huge strides in the late 1980s and early 1990s when personal computers started becoming regular features in offices, classrooms, and homes. I remember getting our first home computer, a Tandy from Radio Shack, in the early 1990s and then getting our first Internet connection at home in about 1995. I set up my first e-mail account in 1996 and remember how novel and exciting it was to send and receive e-mails. I wasn't imagining a time when I would get dozens of e-mails a day, much less be able to check them on my cell phone! Many of you reading this book probably can't remember a time without CMC. If that's the case, then you're what some scholars have called "digital natives." When you take a moment to think about how, over the past twenty years, CMC has changed the way we teach and learn, communicate at work, stay in touch with friends, initiate romantic relationships, search for jobs, manage our money, get our news, and participate in our democracy, it really is amazing to think that all that used to take place without computers. But the increasing use of CMC has also raised some questions and concerns, even among those of you who are digital natives. Almost half of the students in my latest communication research class wanted to do their final research projects on something related to social media. Many of them were interested in studying the effects of CMC on our personal lives and relationships. This desire to study and question CMC may stem from anxiety that people have about the seeming loss or devaluing of face-to-face (FtF) communication. Aside from concerns about the digital cocoons that many of us find ourselves in, CMC has also raised concerns about privacy, cyberbullying, and lack of civility in online interactions. We will continue to explore many of these issues in the "Getting Plugged In" feature box included in each chapter, but the following questions will help you begin to see the influence that CMC has on your daily communication.

1. On a typical day, what types of CMC do you use?
2. What are some ways that CMC reduces stress in your life? What are some ways that CMC increases stress in your life? Overall, do you think CMC adds to or reduces your stress more?

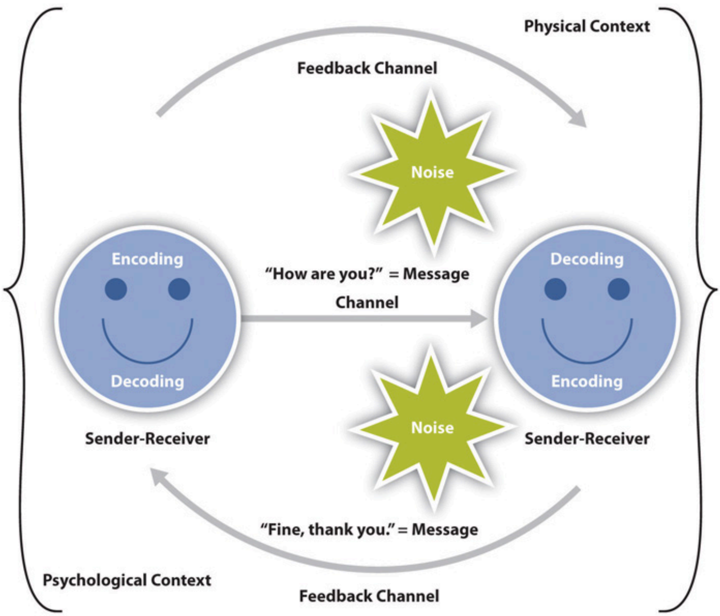
3. Do you think we, as a society, have less value for FtF communication than we used to? Why or why not?

Interaction Model of Communication

The **interaction model** of communication describes communication as a process in which participants alternate positions as sender and receiver and generate meaning by sending messages and receiving feedback within physical and psychological contexts (Schramm, 1997). Rather than illustrating communication as a linear, one-way process, the interaction model incorporates feedback, which makes communication a more ***interactive, two-way process***. **Feedback** includes ***messages sent in response*** to other messages. For example, your instructor may respond to a point you raise during class discussion or you may point to the sofa when your roommate asks you where the remote control is. The inclusion of a feedback loop also leads to a more complex understanding of the roles of participants in a communication encounter. Rather than having one sender, one message, and one receiver, this model has two sender-receivers who exchange messages. Each participant alternates roles as sender and receiver in order to keep a communication encounter going. Although this seems like a perceptible and deliberate process, we alternate between the roles of sender and receiver very quickly and often without conscious thought.

The interaction model is also less message-focused and more interaction-focused. While the transmission model focused on how a message was transmitted and whether or not it was received, the interaction model is more concerned with the communication process itself. In fact, this model acknowledges that there are so many messages being sent at one time that many of them may not even be received. Some messages are also unintentionally sent. Therefore, communication isn't judged effective or ineffective in this model based on whether or not a single message was successfully transmitted and received.

Figure 1.2 The Interaction Model of Communication



The interaction model takes physical and psychological context into account. **Physical context** includes the ***environmental factors*** in a communication encounter. The size, layout, temperature, and lighting of a space influence our communication. Imagine the different physical contexts in which job interviews take place and how that may affect your communication. I have had job interviews on a sofa in a comfortable office, sitting around a large conference table, and even once in an auditorium where I was positioned on the stage facing about twenty potential colleagues seated in the audience. I've also been walked around campus to interview with various people in temperatures below zero degrees. Although I was a little chilly when I got to each separate interview, it wasn't too difficult to warm up and go on with the interview. During a job interview in Puerto Rico, however, walking around outside wearing a suit in near 90 degree temperatures created a sweating situation that wasn't pleasant to try to communicate through. Whether it's the size of the room, the temperature, or other environmental factors, it's important to consider the role that physical context plays in our communication.

Psychological context includes the ***mental and emotional factors*** in a communication encounter. Stress, anxiety, and emotions are just some examples of psychological influences that can affect our communication. I recently found out some troubling news a few hours before a big public presentation. It was challenging to try to communicate because the psychological noise triggered by the stressful news kept intruding into my other thoughts. Seemingly positive psychological states, like experiencing the emotion of love, can also affect communication. During the initial stages of a romantic relationship, individuals may be so "love struck" that they don't see incompatible personality traits or don't negatively evaluate behaviors they might otherwise find off-putting. Feedback and context help make the interaction model a more useful illustration of the communication process, but the transaction model views communication as a powerful tool that shapes our realities beyond individual communication encounters.

Transaction Model of Communication

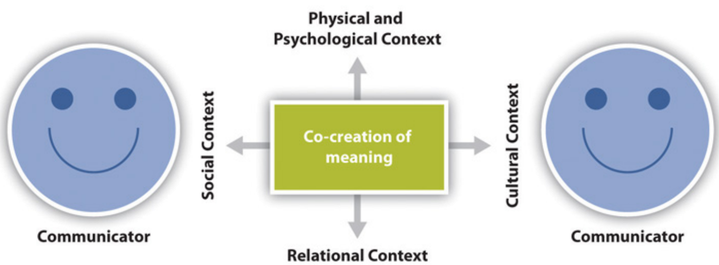
As the study of communication progressed, models expanded to account for more of the communication process. Many scholars view communication as more than a process that is used to carry on conversations and convey meaning. We don't send messages like computers, and we don't neatly alternate between the roles of sender and receiver as an interaction unfolds. We also can't consciously decide to stop communicating because communication is more than sending and receiving messages. The transaction model differs from the transmission and interaction models in significant ways, including the conceptualization of communication, the role of sender and receiver, and the role of context (Barnlund, 1970).

To review, each model incorporates a different understanding of what communication is and what communication does. The transmission model views communication as a thing, like an information packet, that is sent from one place to another. From this view, communication is defined as sending and receiving messages. The interaction model views communication as an interaction in which a message is sent and then followed by a reaction (feedback), which is then followed by another reaction, and so on. From this view, communication is defined as producing conversations and interactions within physical and psychological contexts. The transaction model views communication as integrated into our social realities in such a way that it helps us not only understand them but also create and change them.

The **transaction model** of communication describes ***communication as a process in which communicators generate social realities within social, relational, and cultural contexts***. In this model, we don't just communicate to exchange messages; we communicate to create relationships, form intercultural alliances, shape our self-concepts, and engage with others in dialogue to create communities. In short, we don't communicate about our realities; communication helps to construct our realities.

The roles of sender and receiver in the transaction model of communication differ significantly from the other models. Instead of labeling participants as senders and receivers, the people in a communication encounter are referred to as *communicators*. Unlike the interaction model, which suggests that participants alternate positions as sender and receiver, the transaction model suggests that we are simultaneously senders and receivers. For example, on a first date, as you send verbal messages about your interests and background, your date reacts nonverbally. You don't wait until you are done sending your verbal message to start receiving and decoding the nonverbal messages of your date. Instead, you are simultaneously sending your verbal message and receiving your date's nonverbal messages. This is an important addition to the model because it allows us to understand how we are able to adapt our communication—for example, a verbal message—in the middle of sending it based on the communication we are simultaneously receiving from our communication partner.

Figure 1.3 The Transaction Model of Communication



The transaction model also includes a more complex understanding of context. The interaction model portrays context as physical and psychological influences that enhance or impede communication. While these contexts are important, they focus on message transmission and reception. Since the transaction model of communication views communication as a force that shapes our realities before and after specific interactions occur, it must account for contextual influences outside of a single interaction. To do this, the transaction model considers how social, relational, and cultural contexts frame and influence our communication encounters.

Social context refers to the***stated rules or unstated norms*** that guide communication. As we are socialized into our various communities, we learn rules and implicitly pick up on norms for communicating. Some common rules that influence social contexts include don't lie to people, don't interrupt people, don't pass people in line, greet people when they greet you, thank people when they pay you a compliment, and so on. Parents and teachers often explicitly convey these rules to their children or students. Rules may be stated over and over, and there may be punishment for not following them.

Norms are social conventions that we pick up on through observation, practice, and trial and error. We may not even know we are breaking a social norm until we notice people looking at us strangely or someone corrects or teases us. For example, as a new employee, you may over or underdress for the company's holiday party because you don't know the norm for formality. Although there probably isn't a stated rule about how to dress at the holiday party, you will notice your error without someone having to point it out, and you will likely not deviate from the norm again in order to save yourself any potential embarrassment. Even though breaking social norms doesn't result in the formal punishment that might be a consequence of breaking a social rule, the social awkwardness we feel when we violate social norms is usually enough to teach us that these norms are powerful even though they aren't made explicit like rules. Norms even have the power to override social rules in some situations. To go back to the examples of common social rules mentioned before, we may break the rule about not lying if the lie is meant to save someone from feeling hurt. We often interrupt close friends when we have an exciting conversation, but we wouldn't be as likely to interrupt a professor while they are lecturing. Since norms and rules vary among people and cultures, relational and cultural contexts are also included in the transaction model in order to help us understand the multiple contexts that influence our communication.

Relational context includes the ***previous interpersonal history and type of relationship*** we have with a person. We communicate differently with someone we just met versus someone we've known for a long time. Initial interactions with people tend to be more highly scripted and governed by established norms and rules, but when we have an established relational context, we may be able to bend or break social norms and rules more easily. For example, you would likely follow social norms of politeness and attentiveness and might spend the whole day cleaning the house for the first time you invite your new neighbors to visit. Once the neighbors are in your house, you may also make them the center of your attention during their visit. If you end up becoming friends with your neighbors and establishing a relational context, you might not think as much about having everything cleaned and prepared or even giving them your whole attention during later visits. Since communication norms and rules also vary based on the type of relationship people have, relationship type is also included in a relational context. For example, there are certain communication rules and norms that apply to a supervisor-supervisee relationship that don't apply to a brother-sister relationship and vice versa. Just as social norms and relational history influence how we communicate, so does culture.

Cultural context includes various ***aspects of identities*** such as race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, and ability. We will learn more about these identities in Chapter 2 "Communication and Perception," but for now, it is important for us to understand that whether we are aware of it or not, we all have multiple cultural identities that influence our communication. Some people, especially those with identities that have been historically marginalized, are regularly aware of how their cultural identities influence their communication and influence how others communicate with them. Conversely, people with identities that are dominant or in the majority may rarely, if ever, think about the role their cultural identities play in their communication.

Cultural context is influenced by numerous aspects of our identities and is not limited to race or ethnicity.

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When cultural context comes to the forefront of a communication encounter, it can be difficult to manage. Since intercultural communication creates uncertainty, it can deter people from communicating across cultures or lead people to view intercultural communication as negative. But if you avoid communicating across cultural identities, you will likely not get more comfortable or competent as a communicator. Difference, as we will learn in Chapter 8 "Culture and Communication," isn't a bad thing. In fact, intercultural communication has the potential to enrich various aspects of our lives. In order to communicate well within various cultural contexts, it is important to keep an open mind and avoid making assumptions about others' cultural identities. While you may be able to identify some aspects of the cultural context within a communication encounter, there may also be cultural influences that you can't see. A competent communicator shouldn't assume to know all the cultural contexts a person brings to an encounter since not all cultural identities are visible. As with the other contexts, it requires skill to adapt to shifting contexts, and the best way to develop these skills is through practice and reflection.

Key Takeaways

- Communication models are not complex enough to truly capture all that takes place in a communication encounter, but they can help us examine the various steps in the process in order to better understand our communication and the communication of others.
- The transmission model of communication describes communication as a one-way, linear process in which a sender encodes a message and transmits it through a channel to a receiver who decodes it. The transmission of the message may be disrupted by environmental or semantic noise. This model is usually too simple to capture FtF interactions but can be usefully applied to computer-mediated communication.
- The interaction model of communication describes communication as a two-way process in which participants alternate positions as sender and receiver and generate meaning by sending and

receiving feedback within physical and psychological contexts. This model captures the interactive aspects of communication but still doesn't account for how communication constructs our realities and is influenced by social and cultural contexts.

- The transaction model of communication describes communication as a process in which communicators generate social realities within social, relational, and cultural contexts. This model includes participants who are simultaneously senders and receivers and accounts for how communication constructs our realities, relationships, and communities.

Exercises

1. Getting integrated: How might knowing the various components of the communication process help you in your academic life, your professional life, and your civic life?
2. What communication situations does the transmission model best represent? The interaction model? The transaction model?
3. Use the transaction model of communication to analyze a recent communication encounter you had. Sketch out the communication encounter and make sure to label each part of the model (communicators; message; channel; feedback; and physical, psychological, social, relational, and cultural

contexts).

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1.2 Communication Principles

Learning Objectives

1. Identify principles and characteristics that influence interpersonal communication.

Taking this course will change how you view communication. Most people admit that communication is important, but it's often in the back of our minds or viewed as something that "just happens." Putting communication at the front of your mind and becoming more aware of how you communicate can be informative and have many positive effects. These concepts are relevant to our everyday lives and understanding them provides us the opportunity to more actively and competently participate in various communication contexts. In this section, as we learn the principles of communication, take note of aspects of communication that you may not have thought about before, and think about how you can apply the principles of communication to various parts of your life.

Why We Communicate

Communication is far more than just the transmission of information. The exchange of messages and information is important for many reasons, but it is not enough to meet the various needs we have as human beings. While the content of our communication may help us achieve certain physical and instrumental needs, it also feeds into our identities and relationships in ways that far exceed the content of what we say.

Physical Needs

Physical needs include needs that keep our bodies and minds functioning. Communication, which we most often associate with our brain, mouth, eyes, and ears, actually has many more connections to and effects on our physical body and well-being. At the most basic level, communication can alert others that our physical needs are not being met. Even babies cry when they are hungry or sick to alert their caregiver of these physical needs. Asking a friend if you can stay at their house because you got evicted or kicked out of your own place will help you meet your physical need for shelter. There are also strong ties between the social function of communication and our physical and psychological health. Human beings are social creatures, which makes communication important for our survival. In fact, prolonged isolation has been shown to severely damage a human (Williams & Zadro, 2001). Aside from surviving, communication skills can also help us thrive. People with good interpersonal communication skills are better able to adapt to stress and have less depression and anxiety (Hargie, 2011). Communication can also be therapeutic, which can lessen or prevent physical problems. A research study found that spouses of suicide or accidental death victims who did not communicate about the death with their friends were more likely to have health problems such as weight change and headaches than those who did talk with friends (Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006). Satisfying physical needs is essential for our physical functioning and survival. But, in order to socially function and thrive, we must also meet instrumental, relational, and identity needs.

Instrumental Needs

Instrumental needs include needs that help us get things done in our day-to-day lives and achieve short- and long-term goals. We all have short- and long-term goals that we work on every day. Fulfilling these goals is an ongoing communicative task, which means we spend much of our time communicating for instrumental needs. Some common instrumental needs include influencing others, getting the information we need, or getting support (Burleson, Metts, & Kirch, 2000). In short, communication that meets our instrumental needs helps us "get things done."

Communicating for instrumental needs helps us get things done. Think about how much instrumental communication is required to build a house.

To meet instrumental needs, we often use communication strategically. Politicians, parents, bosses, and friends use communication to influence others in order to accomplish goals and meet needs. There is a research area within communication that examines compliance-gaining communication, or communication aimed at getting people to do something or act in a particular way (Gass & Seiter, 1999). Compliance gaining and communicating for instrumental needs is different from coercion, which forces or manipulates people into doing what you want. In Section 1.3 "Communication Principles", we will discuss communication ethics and learn that open communication, free from constraint and pressure, is an important part of an ethical society. Compliance-gaining communication is also different from persuasion. While research on persuasion typically focuses on public speaking and how a speaker persuades a group, compliance-gaining research focuses on our daily interpersonal interactions. Researchers have identified many tactics that people typically use in compliance-gaining communication (Gass & Seiter, 1999). As you read through the following list, I am sure many of these tactics will be familiar to you.

Common Tactics Used for Compliance Gaining

- **Offering rewards.** Seeks compliance in a positive way, by promising returns, rewards, or generally positive outcomes.
- **Threatening punishment.** Seeks compliance in a negative way, by threatening negative consequences such as loss of privileges, grounding, or legal action.
- **Using expertise.** Seeks compliance by implying that one person "knows better" than the other based on experience, age, education, or intelligence.
- **Liking.** Seeks compliance by acting friendly and helpful to get the other person into a good mood before asking them to do something.
- **Debt.** Seeks compliance by calling in past favors and indicating that one person "owes" the other.
- **Altruism.** Seeks compliance by claiming that one person only wants "what is best" for the other and he or she is looking out for the other person's "best interests."

- **Esteem.** Seeks compliance by claiming that other people will think more highly of the person if he or she complies or think less of the person if he or she does not comply.

Relational Needs

Relational needs include needs that help us maintain social bonds and interpersonal relationships. Communicating to fill our instrumental needs helps us function on many levels, but communicating for relational needs helps us achieve the social relating that is an essential part of being human. Communication meets our relational needs by giving us a tool through which to develop, maintain, and end relationships. In order to develop a relationship, we may use nonverbal communication to assess whether someone is interested in talking to us or not, then use verbal communication to strike up a conversation. Then, through the mutual process of self-disclosure, a relationship forms over time. Once formed, we need to maintain a relationship, so we use communication to express our continued liking of someone. We can verbally say things like "You're such a great friend" or engage in behaviors that communicate our investment in the relationship, like organizing a birthday party. Although our relationships vary in terms of closeness and intimacy, all individuals have relational needs and all relationships require maintenance. Finally, communication or the lack of it helps us end relationships. We may communicate our deteriorating commitment to a relationship by avoiding communication with someone, verbally criticizing him or her, or explicitly ending a relationship. From spending time together, to checking in with relational partners by text, social media, or face-to-face, to celebrating accomplishments, to providing support during difficult times, communication forms the building blocks of our relationships. Communicating for relational needs isn't always positive though. Some people's "relational needs" are negative, unethical, or even illegal. Although we may feel the "need" to be passive-aggressive or controlling, these communicative patterns are not positive and can hurt our relationships. In Chapter 6 "Interpersonal Communication Processes" and Chapter 7 "Communication in Relationships", we will explore the "dark side" of communication in more detail.

Identity Needs

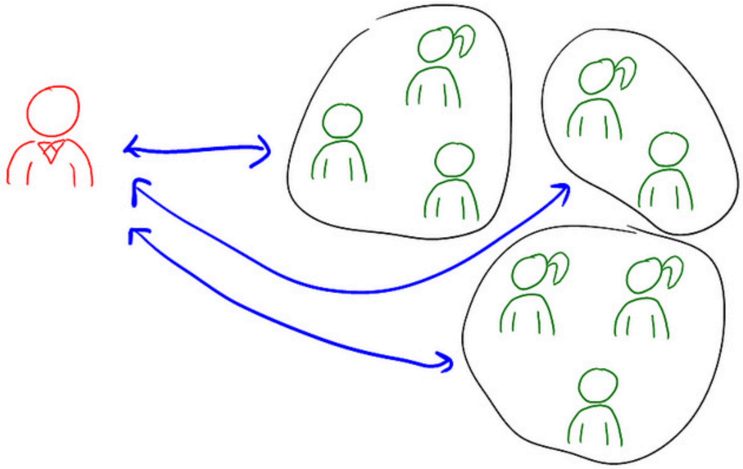
Identity needs include our need to present ourselves to others and be thought of in particular and desired ways. What adjectives would you use to describe yourself? Are you funny, smart, loyal, or quirky? Your answer isn't just based on who you think you are, since much of how we think of ourselves is based on our communication with other people. Our identity changes as we progress through life, but communication is the primary means of establishing our identity and fulfilling our identity needs. Communication allows us to present ourselves to others in particular ways. Just as many companies, celebrities, and politicians create a public image, we desire to present different faces in different contexts. The influential scholar Erving Goffman compared self-presentation to a performance and suggested we all perform different roles in different contexts (Goffman, 1959). Indeed, competent communicators can successfully manage how others perceive them by adapting to situations and contexts. A parent may perform the role of stern head of household, supportive shoulder to cry on, or hip and culturally aware friend based on the situation they are in with their child. A newly hired employee may initially perform the role of motivated and agreeable coworker but later perform more leadership behaviors after being promoted. We will learn more about the different faces we present to the world and how we develop our self-concepts through interactions with others in Chapter 2 "Communication and Perception".

Communication Principles

Communication is a Process

Communication is a process that involves an interchange of verbal and/or nonverbal messages within a continuous and dynamic sequence of events (Hargie, 2011). When we refer to communication as a process, we imply that it doesn't have a distinct beginning and end or follow a predetermined sequence of events. It can be difficult to trace the origin of a communication encounter since communication doesn't always follow a neat and discernible format, which makes studying communication interactions or phenomena difficult. Any time we pull one part of the process out for study or closer examination, we artificially "freeze" the process in order to examine it, which is not something that is possible when communicating in real life. But sometimes scholars want to isolate a particular stage in the process in order to gain insight by studying, for example, feedback or eye contact. Doing that changes the very process itself, and by the time you have examined a particular stage or component of the process, the entire process may have changed. These snapshots are useful for scholarly interrogation of the communication process, and they can also help us evaluate our own communication practices, troubleshoot a problematic encounter we had, or slow things down to account for various contexts before we engage in communication (Dance & Larson, 1976).

We have already learned, in the transaction model of communication, that we communicate using multiple channels and send and receive messages simultaneously. There are also messages and other stimuli around us that we never actually perceive because we can only attend to so much information at one time. The dynamic nature of communication allows us to examine some principles of communication that are related to its processual nature. Next, we will learn that communication messages vary in terms of their level of conscious thought and intention, communication is irreversible, and communication is unrepeatable.



Since communication is such a dynamic process, it is difficult to determine where communication begins and ends.

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Communication is Inevitable

Intent

Some scholars have put forth definitions of communication stating that messages must be intended for others to perceive them in order for a message to "count" as communication. This narrow definition only includes messages that are tailored or at least targeted to a particular person or group and excludes any communication that is involuntary (Dance & Larson, 1976). Since intrapersonal communication happens in our heads and isn't intended for others to perceive, it wouldn't be considered communication. But imagine the following scenario: You and I are riding on a bus and you are sitting across from me. As I sit thinking about a stressful week ahead, I wrinkle up my forehead, shake my head, and put my head in my hands. Upon seeing this you think, "That guy must be pretty stressed out." In this scenario, did communication take place? If I really didn't intend for anyone to see the nonverbal communication that went along with my intrapersonal communication, then this definition would say no. But even though words weren't exchanged, you still generated meaning from the communication I was unintentionally sending. As a communication scholar, I do not take such a narrow definition of communication. Based on the definition of communication from the beginning of this chapter, the scenario we just discussed would count as communication, but the scenario illustrates the point that communication messages are sent both intentionally and unintentionally.

Conscious Thought

Communication messages also vary in terms of the amount of conscious thought that goes into their creation. In general, we can say that intentional communication usually includes more conscious thought and unintentional communication usually includes less. For example, some communication is reactionary and almost completely involuntary. We often scream when we are frightened, say "ouch!" when we stub our toe, and stare blankly when we are bored. This isn't the richest type of communication, but it *is* communication. Some of our interactions are slightly more substantial and include more conscious thought but are still very routine. For example, we say "excuse me" when we need to get past someone, say "thank you" when someone holds the door for us, or say "what's up?" to our neighbor we pass every day in the hall.

The reactionary and routine types of communication just discussed are common, but the messages most studied by communication scholars are considered constructed communication. These messages include more conscious thought and intention than reactionary or routine messages and often go beyond information exchange to also meet relational and identity needs. As we will learn later on, a higher degree of conscious thought and intention doesn't necessarily mean the communication will be effective, understood, or ethical. In addition, ethical communicators cannot avoid responsibility for the effects of what they say by claiming they didn't "intend" for their communication to cause an undesired effect. Communication has short- and long-term effects, which illustrates the next principle we will discuss—communication is irreversible.

Communication is Irreversible

The dynamic nature of the communication process also means that communication is irreversible. After an initial interaction has gone wrong, characters in sitcoms and romantic comedies often use the line "Can we just start over?" As handy as it would be to be able to turn the clock back and "redo" a failed or embarrassing communication encounter, it is impossible. Miscommunication can occur regardless of the degree of conscious thought and intention put into a message. For example, if David tells a joke that offends his coworker Beth, then he can't just say, "Oh, forget I said that," or "I didn't intend for it to be offensive." The message has been sent and it can't be taken back. I'm sure we have all wished we could take something back that we have said.

Communication is Unrepeatable

Conversely, when communication goes well, we often wish we could recreate it. However, in addition to communication being irreversible, it is also unrepeatable. If you try to recreate a good job interview experience by asking the same questions and telling the same stories about yourself, you can't expect the same results. Even trying to repeat a communication encounter with the same person won't feel the same or lead to the same results. We have already learned the influence that contexts have on communication, and those contexts change frequently. Even if the words and actions stay the same, the physical, psychological, social, relational, and cultural contexts will vary and ultimately change the communication encounter. Have you ever tried to recount a funny or interesting experience to a friend who doesn't really seem that impressed? These "I guess you had to be there" moments illustrate the fact that communication is unrepeatable.

Dimensions of Communication

When we communicate with other people, we must always remember that our communication is interpreted at multiple levels. Two common dimensions used to ascertain meaning during communication are relational and content.

Relational Dimension

Every time we communicate with others, there is a relational dimension. You can communicate in a tone of friendship, love, hatred, and so forth. This is indicated in how you communicate with your receiver. Think about the phrase, "You are crazy!" It means different things depending on the source of the message. For instance, if your boss said it, you might take it harsher than if your close friend said it to you. You are more likely to receive a message more accurately when you can define the type of relationship that you have with this person. Hence, your relationship with the person determines how you are more likely to interpret the message. Take another example of the words "I want to see you now!" These same words might mean different things if it comes from your boss or if it comes from your lover. You will know that if your boss wants to see you, then it is probably an urgent matter that needs your immediate attention. However, if your lover said it, then you might think that they miss you and can't bear the thought of being without you for too long.

Content Dimension

In the same fashion, every time we speak, we have a content dimension. The content dimension is the information that is stated explicitly in the message. When people focus on the content of a message, they ignore the relationship dimension. They are focused on the specific words that were used to convey the message. For instance, if you ran into an ex-lover who said "I'm happy for you" about your new relationship. You might wonder what that phrase means. Did it mean that your ex was truly happy for you, or that they were happy to see you in a new relationship, or that your ex thinks that you are happy? One will ponder many interpretations of the message, especially if a relationship is not truly defined.

Another example might be a new acquaintance who talks about how your appearance looks "interesting." You might be wondering if your new friend is sarcastic, or if they just didn't know a nicer way of expressing their opinion. Because your relationship is so new, you might think about why they decided to pick that term over another term. Hence, the content of a message impacts how it is received.

Communication Is Guided by Culture and Context

As we learned earlier, context is a dynamic component of the communication process. Culture and context also influence how we perceive and define communication. Western culture tends to put more value on senders than receivers and on the content rather than the context of a message. These cultural values are reflected in our definitions and models of communication. As we will learn in later chapters, cultures vary in terms of having a more individualistic or more collectivistic cultural orientation. The United States is considered an individualistic culture, where the emphasis is put on individual expression and success. Japan is considered a collectivistic culture, where the emphasis is put on group cohesion and harmony. These are strong cultural values that are embedded in how we learn to communicate. In many collectivistic cultures, there is more emphasis placed on silence and nonverbal context. Whether in the United States, Japan, or another country, people are socialized from birth to communication in culturally specific ways that vary by context.

Communication Is Learned

Most people are born with the capacity and ability to communicate, but everyone communicates differently. This is because communication is learned rather than innate. As we have already seen, communication patterns are relative to the context and culture in which one is communicating, and many cultures have distinct languages consisting of symbols.

A key principle of communication is that it is symbolic. Communication is symbolic in that the words that make up our language systems do not directly correspond to something in reality. Instead, they stand in for or symbolize something. The fact that communication varies so much among people, contexts, and cultures illustrates the principle that meaning is not inherent in the words we use. For example, let's say you go to France on vacation and see the word *poisson* on the menu. Unless you know how to read French, you will not know that the symbol is the same as the English symbol *fish*. Those two words don't look the same at all, yet they symbolize the same object. If you went by how the word looks alone, you might think that the French word for fish is more like the English word *poison* and avoid choosing that for your dinner. Putting a picture of a fish on a menu would definitely help a foreign tourist understand what they are ordering, since the picture is an actual representation of the object rather than a symbol for it.

All symbolic communication is learned, negotiated, and dynamic. We know that the letters *b-o-o-k* refer to a bound object with multiple written pages. We also know that the letters *t-r-u-c-k* refer to a vehicle with a bed in the back for hauling things. But if we learned in school that the letters *t-r-u-c-k* referred to a bound object with written pages and *b-o-o-k* referred to a vehicle with a bed in the back, then that would make just as much sense, because the letters don't actually refer to the object and the word itself only has the meaning that we assign to it. We will learn more, in Chapter 3 "Verbal Communication", about how language works, but communication is more than the words we use.

We are all socialized into different languages, but we also speak different "languages" based on the situation we are in. For example, in some cultures it is considered inappropriate to talk about family or health issues in public, but it wouldn't be odd to overhear people in a small town grocery store in the United States talking about their children or their upcoming surgery. There are some communication patterns shared by very large numbers of people and some that are particular to a dyad—best friends, for example, who have their own inside terminology and expressions that wouldn't make sense to anyone else. These examples aren't on the same scale as differing languages, but they still indicate that communication is learned.

They also illustrate how rules and norms influence how we communicate.

Communication is Guided by Rules and Norms

Earlier we learned about the transaction model of communication and the powerful influence that social context and the roles and norms associated with social context have on our communication. Whether verbal or nonverbal, mediated or interpersonal, our communication is guided by rules and norms.

Phatic communion is an instructive example of how we communicate under the influence of rules and norms (Senft, 2009). Phatic communion refers to scripted and routine verbal interactions that are intended to establish social bonds rather than actually exchange meaning. When you pass your professor in the hall, the exchange may go as follows:

Student:
"Hey, how are you?"
Professor:
"Fine, how are you?"
Student:
"Fine."

What is the point of this interaction? It surely isn't to actually inquire as to each other's well-being. We have similar phatic interactions when we make comments on the weather or the fact that it's Monday. We often joke about phatic communion because we see that is pointless, at least on the surface. The student and professor might as well just pass each other in the hall and say the following to each other:

Student:
"Generic greeting question."
Professor:
"Generic greeting response and question."
Student:
"Generic response."

This is an example of communication messages that don't really require a high level of conscious thought or convey much actual content or generate much meaning. So if phatic communion is so "pointless," why do we do it?

Rules and norms guide much of our communication. Think of all the unspoken norms for behavior in a crowded elevator.

The term *phatic communion* derives from the Greek word *phatos*, which means "spoken," and the word *communion*, which means "connection or bond." As we discussed earlier, communication helps us meet our relational needs. In addition to finding communion through food or religion, we also find communion through our words. But the degree to which and in what circumstances we engage in phatic communion is also influenced by norms and rules. Generally, US Americans find silence in social interactions awkward, which is one sociocultural norm that leads to phatic communion, because we fill the silence with pointless words to meet the social norm. It is also a norm to greet people when you encounter them, especially if you know them. We all know not to unload our physical and mental burdens on the person who asks, "How are you?" or go through our "to do" list with the person who asks, "What's up?" Instead, we conform to social norms through this routine type of verbal exchange.

Phatic communion, like most aspects of communication we will learn about, is culturally relative as well. While most cultures engage in phatic communion, the topics of and occasions for phatic communion vary. Scripts for greetings in the United States are common, but scripts for leaving may be more common in another culture. Asking about someone's well-being may be acceptable phatic communion in one culture, and asking about the health of someone's family may be more common in another.

Communication Has Ethical Implications

Another culturally and situationally relative principle of communication is the fact that communication has ethical implications. Communication ethics deals with the process of negotiating and reflecting on our actions and communication regarding what we believe to be right and wrong. Aristotle said, "In the arena of human life the honors and rewards fall to those who show their good qualities in action" (Pearson et al., 2006). Aristotle focuses on actions, which is an important part of communication ethics. While ethics has been studied as a part of philosophy since the time of Aristotle, only more recently has it become applied. In communication ethics, we are more concerned with the decisions people make about what is right and wrong than the systems, philosophies, or religions that inform those decisions. Much of ethics is gray area. Although we talk about making decisions in terms of what is right and what is wrong, the choice is rarely that simple. Aristotle goes on to say that we should act "to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way." This quote connects to communication competence, which focuses on communicating effectively and appropriately and will be discussed more in Section 1.3 "Communication Competence".

Ethics deals with our beliefs about what is right and wrong, but the choice is often not as clear-cut.

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Communication has broad ethical implications. When dealing with communication ethics, it's difficult to state that something is 100 percent ethical or unethical. We all make choices daily that are more ethical or less ethical, and we may confidently make a decision only later to learn that it wasn't the most ethical option. In such cases, our ethics and goodwill are tested, since in any given situation multiple options may seem appropriate, but we can only choose one. If, in a situation, we make a decision and we reflect on it and realize we could have made a more ethical choice, does that make us a bad person? While many behaviors can be more easily labeled as ethical or unethical, communication isn't always as clear. Murdering someone is generally thought of as unethical and illegal, but many instances of hurtful speech, or even what some would consider hate speech, have been protected as free speech. This shows the complicated relationship between protected speech, ethical speech, and the law. In some cases, people see it as their ethical duty to communicate information that they feel is in the public's best interest. The people behind WikiLeaks, for example, have released thousands of classified documents related to wars, intelligence gathering, and diplomatic communication. WikiLeaks claims that exposing this information keeps politicians and leaders accountable and keeps the public informed, but government officials claim the release of the information should be considered a criminal act. Both parties consider the other's communication unethical and their own communication ethical. Who is right?

Since many of the choices we make when it comes to ethics are situational, contextual, and personal, various professional fields have developed codes of ethics to help guide members through areas that might otherwise be gray or uncertain. The following "Getting Critical" box includes information about the National Communication Association's Ethical Credo. Doctors take oaths to do no harm to their patients, and journalists follow ethical guidelines that promote objectivity and provide for the protection of sources. Although businesses and corporations have gotten much attention for high-profile cases of unethical behavior, business ethics has become an important part of the curriculum in many business schools, and more companies are adopting ethical guidelines for their employees.

"Getting Critical"

NCA Credo for Ethical Communication

The "Getting Critical" boxes throughout this book will challenge you to think critically about a variety of communication issues, and many of those issues will involve questions of ethics. Therefore, it is important that we have a shared understanding of ethical standards for communication. I tell my students that I consider them communication scholars while they are in my class, and we always take a class period to learn about ethics using the National Communication Association's (NCA) "Credo for Ethical Communication," since the NCA is the professional organization that represents communication scholars and practitioners in the United States.

We all have to consider and sometimes struggle with questions of right and wrong. Since communication is central to the creation of our relationships and communities, ethical communication should be a priority of every person who wants to make a positive contribution to society. The NCA's "Credo for Ethical Communication" reminds us that communication ethics is relevant across contexts and applies to every channel of communication, including media (National Communication Association, 2012). The credo goes on to say that human worth and dignity are fostered through ethical communication practices such as truthfulness, fairness, integrity, and respect for self and others. The emphasis in the credo and in the study of communication ethics is on practices and actions rather than thoughts and philosophies. Many people claim high ethical standards but do not live up to them in practice. While the credo advocates for, endorses and promotes certain ideals, it is up to each one of us to put them into practice. The following are some of the principles stated in the credo:

- We endorse freedom of expression, diversity of perspective, and tolerance of dissent to achieve the informed and responsible decision making fundamental to a civil society.
- We condemn communication that degrades individuals and humanity through the expression of intolerance and hatred.
- We are committed to the courageous expression of personal convictions in pursuit of fairness and justice.
- We accept responsibility for the short- and long-term consequences of our own communication and expect the same of others.

1. What are some examples of unethical communication that you have witnessed?
2. Read through the whole credo. Of the nine principles listed, which do you think is most important and why? The credo can be accessed at the following link: http://natcom.org/

Tertiary.aspx?id=2119&terms=ethical%20credo.

Key Takeaways

- Communication meets our physical needs by helping us maintain physical and psychological well-being; our instrumental needs by helping us achieve short- and long-term goals; our relational needs by helping us initiate, maintain, and terminate relationships; and our identity needs by allowing us to present ourselves to others in particular ways.
- Communication is a process that includes messages that vary in terms of conscious thought and intention. Communication is also irreversible and unrepeatable.
- Communication is guided by culture and context.
- We learn to communicate using systems that vary based on culture and language.
- Communication has both relational and content dimensions.
- Rules and norms influence the routines and rituals within our communication.
- Communication ethics varies by culture and context and involves the negotiation of and reflection on our actions regarding what we think is right and wrong.

Exercises

1. Identify some physical, instrumental, relational, and identity needs that communication helps you meet in a given day.
2. We learned in this section that communication is irreversible and unrepeatable. Identify a situation in which you wished you could reverse communication. Identify a situation in which you wished you could repeat communication. Even though it's impossible to reverse or repeat communication, what lessons can be learned from these two situations you identified that you can apply to future communication?
3. What types of phatic communion do you engage in? How are they connected to context and/or social rules and norms?

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1.3 Communication Competence

Learning Objectives

1. Define communication competence.
2. Explain each part of the definition of communication competence.
3. Discuss strategies for developing communication competence.
4. Discuss communication apprehension and public speaking anxiety and employ strategies to manage them.

Communication competence has become a focus in higher education over the past couple of decades as educational policymakers and advocates have stressed a "back to basics" mentality (McCroskey, 1984). The ability to communicate effectively is often included as a primary undergraduate learning goal along with other key skills like writing, critical thinking, and problem-solving. You likely haven't heard professors or university administrators use the term *communication competence*, but as we learn more about it in this section, I am sure you will see how communication competence can benefit you in many aspects of your life. Since this book focuses on communication in the real world, strategies for developing communication competence are not only limited to this section. A "Getting Competent" feature box is included in each chapter, specifically to help you develop communication competence.

Defining Competence

We have already defined *communication*, and you probably know that to be competent at something means you know what you're doing. When we combine these terms, we get the following definition: communication competence refers to the knowledge of effective and appropriate communication patterns and the ability to use and adapt that knowledge in various contexts (Cooley & Roach, 1984). To better understand this definition, let's break apart its components.

Developing communication competence can bring many rewards, but it also requires time and effort.

The first part of the definition we will unpack deals with *knowledge*. The cognitive elements of competence include knowing how to do something and understanding why things are done the way they are (Hargie, 2011). People can develop cognitive competence by observing and evaluating the actions of others. Cognitive competence can also be developed through instruction. Since you are currently taking a communication class, I encourage you to try to observe the communication concepts you are learning in the communication practices of others and yourself. This will help bring the concepts to life and also help you evaluate how communication in the real world matches up with communication concepts. As you build a repertoire of communication knowledge based on your experiential and classroom knowledge, you will also be developing behavioral competence.

The second part of the definition of communication competence that we will unpack is *the ability to use*. Individual factors affect our ability to do anything. Not everyone has the same athletic, musical, or intellectual ability. At the individual level, a person's physiological and psychological characteristics affect competence. In terms of physiology, age, maturity, and ability to communicate affect competence. In terms of psychology, a person's mood, stress level, personality, and level of communication apprehension (level of anxiety regarding communication) affect competence (Cooley & Roach, 1984). All these factors will either help or hinder you when you try to apply the knowledge you have learned to actual communication behaviors. For example, you might know strategies for being an effective speaker, but public speaking anxiety that kicks in when you get in front of the audience may prevent you from fully putting that knowledge into practice.

The third part of the definition we will unpack is the ability to *adapt* to *various contexts*. What is competent or not varies based on social and cultural context, which makes it impossible to have only one standard for what counts as communication competence

(Cooley & Roach, 1984). Social variables such as status and power affect competence. In a social situation where one person—say, a supervisor—has more power than another—for example, his or her employee—then the supervisor is typically the one who sets the standard for competence. Cultural variables such as race and nationality also affect competence. A Taiwanese woman who speaks English as her second language may be praised for her competence in the English language in her home country but be viewed as less competent in the United States because of her accent. In summary, although we have a clear definition of communication competence, there are not definitions for how to be competent in any given situation, since competence varies at the individual, social, and cultural level.

Despite the fact that no guidelines for or definitions of competence will be applicable in all situations, the National Communication Association (NCA) has identified many aspects of competence related to communication. The primary focus has been on competencies related to speaking and listening, and the NCA notes that developing communication competence in these areas will help people in academic, professional, and civic contexts (Morreale, Rubin, & Jones, 1998). To help colleges and universities develop curriculum and instruction strategies to prepare students, the NCA has defined what students should be able to do in terms of speaking and listening competencies by the time they graduate from college:

1. State ideas clearly.
2. Communicate ethically.
3. Recognize when it is appropriate to communicate.
4. Identify their communication goals.
5. Select the most appropriate and effective medium for communicating.
6. Demonstrate credibility.
7. Identify and manage misunderstandings.
8. Manage conflict.

9. Be open-minded about another's point of view.
10. Listen attentively.

These are just some of the competencies the NCA identified as important for college graduates. While these are skill-focused rather than interpersonally or culturally focused, they provide a concrete way to assess your own speaking competencies and to prepare yourself for professional speaking and listening, which is often skill-driven. Since we communicate in many different contexts, such as interpersonal, group, intercultural, and mediated, we will discuss more specific definitions of competence in later sections of the book.

Developing Competence

Knowing the dimensions of competence is an important first step toward developing competence. Everyone reading this book already has some experience with and knowledge about communication. After all, you've spent many years explicitly and implicitly learning to communicate. For example, we are explicitly taught the verbal codes we use to communicate. On the other hand, although there are numerous rules and norms associated with nonverbal communication, we rarely receive explicit instruction on how to do it. Instead, we learn by observing others and through trial and error with our own nonverbal communication. Competence obviously involves verbal and nonverbal elements, but it also applies to many situations and contexts. Communication competence is needed in order to understand communication ethics, to develop cultural awareness, to use computer-mediated communication, and to think critically. Competence involves knowledge, motivation, and skills. It's not enough to know what good communication consists of; you must also have the motivation to reflect on and better your communication and the skills needed to do so.

In regards to competence, we all have areas where we are skilled and areas where we have deficiencies. In most cases, we can consciously decide to work on our deficiencies, which may take considerable effort. There are multiple stages of competence that I challenge you to assess as you communicate in your daily life: unconscious incompetence, conscious incompetence, conscious competence, and unconscious competence (Hargie, 2011). Before you have built up a rich cognitive knowledge base of communication concepts and practiced and reflected on skills in a particular area, you may exhibit unconscious incompetence, which means you are not even aware that you are communicating in an incompetent manner. Once you learn more about communication and have a vocabulary to identify concepts, you may find yourself exhibiting conscious incompetence. This is where you know what you should be doing, and you realize that you're not doing it as well as you could. However, as your skills increase you may advance to conscious competence, meaning that you know you are communicating well in the moment, which will add to your bank of experiences to draw from in future interactions. When you reach the stage of unconscious competence, you just communicate successfully without straining to be competent. Just because you reach the stage of unconscious competence in one area or with one person does not mean you will always stay there. We are faced with new communication encounters regularly, and although we may be able to draw on the communication skills we have learned about and developed, it may take a few instances of conscious incompetence before you can advance to later stages.

In many introductory communication classes that I teach, a student usually says something like "You must be really good at this stuff since you study it and have been teaching it for a while." At the same time students assume that I have a high level of communication competence, they are hard on themselves for being at the stage of conscious incompetence, where they catch themselves communicating poorly in regards to a concept we recently studied. In response to both of these comments, I say, "Just because I know the concepts and definitions doesn't mean I always put them to good use. We're all imperfect and fallible, and if we expect to be perfect communicators after studying this, then we're setting ourselves up for failure. However, when I do mess up, I almost always make a mental note and reflect on it. And now you're starting to do the same thing, which is to notice and reflect on your communication more. And that already puts you ahead of most people!"

Becoming more mindful of your communication and the communication of others can contribute to your communication competence.

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One way to progress toward communication competence is to become a more mindful communicator. A mindful communicator actively and fluidly processes information, is sensitive to communication contexts and multiple perspectives, and is able to adapt to novel communication situations (Burgoon, Berger, &

Waldron, 2000). Becoming a more mindful communicator has many benefits, including achieving communication goals, detecting deception, avoiding stereotypes, and reducing conflict. Whether or not we achieve our day-to-day communication goals depends on our communication competence. Various communication behaviors can signal that we are communicating mindfully. For example, asking an employee to paraphrase their understanding of the instructions you just gave them shows that you are aware that verbal messages are not always clear, that people do not always listen actively, and that people often do not speak up when they are unsure of instructions for fear of appearing incompetent or embarrassing themselves. Some communication behaviors indicate that we are not communicating mindfully, such as withdrawing from a romantic partner or engaging in passive-aggressive behavior during a period of interpersonal conflict. Most of us know that such behaviors lead to predictable and avoidable conflict cycles, yet we are all guilty of them. Our tendency to assume that people are telling us the truth can also lead to negative results. Therefore, a certain amount of tentativeness and mindful monitoring of a person's nonverbal and verbal communication can help us detect deception. However, this is not the same thing as chronic suspicion, which would not indicate communication competence. This is just the beginning of our conversation about communication competence. Regarding the previous examples, we will learn more about paraphrasing in Chapter 5 "Listening", conflict management in Chapter 6 "Interpersonal Communication Processes", and deception in Chapter 4 "Nonverbal Communication".

"Getting Competent"

Getting Started on Your Road to Communication Competence

The "Getting Competent" boxes throughout this book are meant to help you become a more confident and skilled communicator. While each box will focus on a specific aspect of communication competence, this box addresses communication competence more generally. A common communication pitfall that is an obstacle on many students' roads to communication competence is viewing communication as "common sense."

Many students note that some of what we learn in communication classes is "common sense." I agree with this observation in some cases but disagree with it in others. As I've noted before, this class builds on knowledge that you have already gained, through experience and observation as a person with many years of communication under your belt. For example, a student might say that it is "common sense" that conflict avoidance can lead to built-up tensions that eventually hurt an interpersonal relationship. But many of us avoid confronting what is causing conflict in our relationships even though we know it's better to talk about our problems than to let them build up. In order to put that "commonsense" knowledge to competent use, we must have a more nuanced understanding of how conflict and interpersonal communication relate and know some conflict management strategies.

Communication is common in that it is something that we spend most of our time doing, but the ability to make sense of and improve our communication takes competence that is learned through deliberate study and personal reflection. So, to get started on your road to competence, I am proposing that you do two things. First, challenge yourself to see the value in the study of communication. Apply the concepts we are learning to your life and find ways to make this class help you achieve your goals. Second, commit to using the knowledge you gain in this class to improve your communication and the communication of those around you. Become a higher self-monitor, which means start to notice your communication more. We all know areas where we could improve our communication, and taking this class will probably expose even more. But you have to be prepared to put in the time to improve; for example, it takes effort to become a better listener or to give better feedback. If you start these things now you will be primed to take on more communication challenges that will be presented throughout this book.

1. What aspects of communication do you think are "common sense?" What aspects of communication do you think require more formal instruction and/or study?
2. What communication concept has appealed to you most so far? How can you see this concept applying to your life?
3. Do a communication self-assessment. What are your strengths as a communicator? What are your weaknesses? What can you do to start improving your communication competence?

Communication Apprehension

Communication apprehension and public speaking anxiety are common but can be managed productively.

Decades of research conducted by communication scholars show that communication apprehension is common among college students (Priem & Solomon, 2009). Communication apprehension (CA) is fear or anxiety experienced by a person due to actual or imagined communication with another person or persons. While we may associate CA with public speaking, it actually includes multiple forms of communication. Of college students, 15 to 20 percent experience high trait CA, meaning they are generally anxious about communication. Furthermore, 70 percent of college students experience some trait CA. Addressing communication anxiety in a class like the one you're taking now stands to benefit the majority of students (Priem & Solomon, 2009). Communication departments are typically the only departments that address communication apprehension explicitly, which is important as CA is "related to negative academic consequences such as negative attitudes toward school, lower over-all classroom achievement, lower final course grades, and higher college attrition rates" (Allen, Hunter, & Donohue, 2009). Additionally, CA can lead others to make assumptions about your communication competence that may be unfavorable. Even if you are intelligent, prepared, and motivated, CA and can detract from your communication and lead others to perceive you in ways you did not intend. CA is a common issue faced by many people, so you are not alone. We will discuss methods for dealing with CA throughout this course.

Key Takeaways

- Communication competence refers to the knowledge of effective and appropriate communication patterns and the ability to use and adapt that knowledge in various contexts.
- To be a competent communicator, you should have cognitive knowledge about communication based on observation and instruction; understand that individual, social, and cultural contexts affect competence; and be able to adapt to those various contexts.
- Getting integrated: The NCA notes that developing communication competence in speaking and listening will help college students in academic, professional, and civic contexts.
- Levels of communication competence include

unconscious incompetence, conscious incompetence, conscious competence, and unconscious competence.

- In order to develop communication competence, you must become a more mindful communicator and a higher self-monitor.
- Communication apprehension (CA) refers to fear or anxiety experienced by a person due to real or imagined communication with another person or persons. Public speaking anxiety is a form of CA that more specifically focuses on anxiety about giving a public presentation. Both are commonly experienced by most people and can be managed using various strategies.

Exercises

1. Getting integrated: Evaluate your speaking and listening competencies based on the list generated by the NCA. Out of the skills listed, which ones are you more competent in and less competent in? Which skill will be most useful for you in academic contexts? Professional contexts? Personal contexts? Civic contexts?
2. Think of a person you know who you think possesses a high level of communication competence. What makes you think this? What communication characteristics do they have that you might want to

have yourself?

3. What anxieties do you have regarding communication and/or public speaking? Since communication and speaking are a necessary part of life, identify some strategies you can use to manage those anxieties.

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1.4 Intercultural Communication Competence

Learning Objectives

1. Define intercultural communication competence.
2. Explain how motivation, self- and other-knowledge, and tolerance for uncertainty relate to intercultural communication competence.
3. Summarize the three ways to cultivate intercultural communication competence that are discussed.
4. Apply the concept of "thinking under the influence" as a reflective skill for building intercultural communication competence.

Throughout this book we have been putting various tools in our communication toolbox to improve our communication competence. Many of these tools can be translated into intercultural contexts. While building any form of competence requires effort, building intercultural communication competence often requires us to take more risks. Some of these risks require us to leave our comfort zones and adapt to new and uncertain situations. In this section, we will learn some of the skills needed to be an interculturally competent communicator.

Components of Intercultural Communication Competence

Intercultural communication competence (ICC) is the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in various cultural contexts. There are numerous components of ICC. Some key components include motivation, self- and other knowledge, and tolerance for uncertainty.

Initially, a person's motivation for communicating with people from other cultures must be considered. Motivation refers to the root of a person's desire to foster intercultural relationships and can be intrinsic or extrinsic (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). Put simply, if a person isn't motivated to communicate with people from different cultures, then the components of ICC discussed next don't really matter. If a person has a healthy curiosity that drives him or her toward intercultural encounters in order to learn more about self and others, then there is a foundation from which to build additional competence-relevant attitudes and skills. This intrinsic motivation makes intercultural communication a voluntary, rewarding, and lifelong learning process. Motivation can also be extrinsic, meaning that the desire for intercultural communication is driven by an outside reward like money, power, or recognition. While both types of motivation can contribute to ICC, context may further enhance or impede a person's motivation to communicate across cultures.

Members of dominant groups are often less motivated, intrinsically and extrinsically, toward intercultural communication than members of nondominant groups, because they don't see the incentives for doing so. Having more power in communication encounters can create an unbalanced situation where the individual from the nondominant group is expected to exhibit competence, or the ability to adapt to the communication behaviors and attitudes of the other. Even in situations where extrinsic rewards like securing an overseas business investment are at stake, it is likely that the foreign investor is much more accustomed to adapting to United

States business customs and communication than vice versa. This expectation that others will adapt to our communication can be unconscious, but later ICC skills we will learn will help bring it to awareness.

The unbalanced situation I just described is a daily reality for many individuals with nondominant identities. Their motivation toward intercultural communication may be driven by survival in terms of functioning effectively in dominant contexts. Recall the phenomenon known as code-switching discussed earlier, in which individuals from nondominant groups adapt their communication to fit in with the dominant group. In such instances, African Americans may "talk white" by conforming to what is called "standard English," women in corporate environments may adapt masculine communication patterns, people who are gay or lesbian may self-censor and avoid discussing their same-gender partners with coworkers, and people with nonvisible disabilities may not disclose them in order to avoid judgment.

While intrinsic motivation captures an idealistic view of intercultural communication as rewarding in its own right, many contexts create extrinsic motivation. In either case, there is a risk that an individual's motivation can still lead to incompetent communication. For example, it would be exploitative for an extrinsically motivated person to pursue intercultural communication solely for an external reward and then abandon the intercultural relationship once the reward is attained. These situations highlight the relational aspect of ICC, meaning that the motivation of all parties should be considered. Motivation alone cannot create ICC.

Knowledge supplements motivation and is an important part of building ICC. Knowledge includes self- and other-awareness, mindfulness, and cognitive flexibility. Building knowledge of our own cultures, identities, and communication patterns takes more than passive experience (Martin & Nakayama). As you'll recall from Chapter 2 "Communication and Perception", on perception, we learn who we are through our interactions with others. Developing cultural self-awareness often requires us to get out of our comfort zones. Listening to people who are different from us is a key component of developing self-knowledge. This may be uncomfortable, because we may realize that people think of our identities differently than we thought. For example, when I lived in Sweden, my Swedish roommates often discussed how they were wary of befriending students from the United States. They perceived US Americans to be shallow because they were friendly and exciting while they were in Sweden but didn't remain friends once they left. Although I was initially upset by their assessment, I came to see the truth in it. Swedes are generally more reserved than US Americans and take longer to form close friendships. The comparatively extroverted nature of the Americans led some of the Swedes to overestimate the depth of their relationship, which ultimately hurt them when the Americans didn't stay in touch. This made me more aware of how my communication was perceived, enhancing my self-knowledge. I also learned more about communication behaviors of the Swedes, which contributed to my other-knowledge.

The most effective way to develop other-knowledge is by direct and thoughtful encounters with other cultures. However, people may not readily have these opportunities for a variety of reasons. Despite the overall diversity in the United States, many people still only interact with people who are similar to them. Even in a racially diverse educational setting, for example, people often group off with people of their own race. While a heterosexual person may have a gay or lesbian friend or relative, they likely spend most of their time with other heterosexuals. Unless you interact with people with disabilities as part of your job or have a person with a disability in your friend or family group, you likely spend most of your time interacting with able-bodied people. Living in a rural area may limit your ability to interact with a range of cultures, and most people do not travel internationally regularly. Because of this, we may have to make a determined effort to interact with other cultures or rely on educational sources like college classes, books, or documentaries. Learning another language is also a good way to learn about a culture, because you can then read the news or watch movies in the native language, which can offer insights that are lost in translation. It is important to note though that we must evaluate the credibility of the source of our knowledge, whether it is a book, person, or other source. Also, knowledge of another language does not automatically equate to ICC.

Developing self- and other-knowledge is an ongoing process that will continue to adapt and grow as we encounter new experiences. Mindfulness and cognitive complexity will help as we continue to build our ICC (Pusch, 2009). Mindfulness is a state of self- and other-monitoring that informs later reflection on communication interactions. As mindful communicators we should ask questions that focus on the interactive process like "How is our communication going? What are my reactions? What are their reactions?" Being able to adapt our communication in the moment based on our answers to these questions is a skill that comes with a high level of ICC. Reflecting on the communication encounter later to see what can be learned is also a way to build ICC. We should then be able to incorporate what we learned into our communication frameworks, which requires cognitive flexibility. Cognitive flexibility refers to the ability to continually supplement and revise existing knowledge to create new categories rather than forcing new knowledge into old categories. Cognitive flexibility helps prevent our knowledge from becoming stale and also prevents the formation of stereotypes and can help us avoid prejudging an encounter or jumping to conclusions. In summary, to be better intercultural communicators, we should know much about others and ourselves and be able to reflect on and adapt our knowledge as we gain new experiences.

Motivation and knowledge can inform us as we gain new experiences, but how we feel in the moment of intercultural encounters is also important. Tolerance for uncertainty refers to an individual's attitude about and level of comfort in uncertain situations (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). Some people perform better in uncertain situations than others, and intercultural encounters often bring up uncertainty. Whether communicating with someone of a different gender, race, or nationality, we are often wondering what we should or shouldn't do or say. Situations of uncertainty most often become clearer as they progress, but the anxiety that an individual with a low tolerance for uncertainty feels may lead them to leave the situation or otherwise communicate in a less competent manner. Individuals with a high tolerance for uncertainty may exhibit more patience, waiting on new information to become available or seeking out information, which may then increase the understanding of the situation and lead to a more successful outcome (Pusch, 2009). Individuals who are intrinsically motivated toward intercultural communication may have a higher tolerance for uncertainty, in that their curiosity leads them to engage with others who are different because they find the self- and other-knowledge gained rewarding.

Cultivating Intercultural Communication Competence

How can ICC be built and achieved? This is a key question we will address in this section. Two main ways to build ICC are through experiential learning and reflective practices (Bednarz, 2010). We must first realize that competence isn't any one thing. Part of being competent means that you can assess new situations and adapt your existing knowledge to the new contexts. What it means to be competent will vary depending on your physical location, your role (personal, professional, etc.), and your life stage, among other things. Sometimes we will know or be able to figure out what is expected of us in a given situation, but sometimes we may need to act in unexpected ways to meet the needs of a situation. Competence enables us to better cope with the unexpected, adapt to the nonroutine, and connect to uncommon frameworks. I have always told my students that ICC is less about a list of rules and more about a box of tools.

Three ways to cultivate ICC are to foster attitudes that motivate us, discover knowledge that informs us, and develop skills that enable us (Bennett, 2009). To foster attitudes that motivate us, we must develop a sense of wonder about culture. This sense of wonder can lead to feeling overwhelmed, humbled, or awed (Opdal, 2001). This sense of wonder may correlate to a high tolerance for uncertainty, which can help us turn potentially frustrating experiences we have into teachable moments. I've had many such moments in my intercultural encounters at home and abroad. One such moment came the first time I tried to cook a frozen pizza in the oven in the shared kitchen of my apartment in Sweden. The information on the packaging was written in Swedish, but like many college students, I had a wealth of experience cooking frozen pizzas to draw from. As I went to set the oven dial to preheat, I noticed it was strange that the oven didn't go up to my usual 425–450 degrees. Not to be deterred, I cranked the dial up as far as it would go, waited a few minutes, put my pizza in, and walked down the hall to my room to wait for about fifteen minutes until the pizza was done. The smell of smoke drew me from my room before the fifteen minutes was up, and I walked into a corridor filled with smoke and the smell of burnt pizza. I pulled the pizza out and was puzzled for a few minutes while I tried to figure out why the pizza burned so quickly, when one of my corridor-mates gently pointed out that the oven temperatures in Sweden are listed in Celsius, not Fahrenheit! Despite almost burning the kitchen down, I learned a valuable lesson about assuming my map for temperatures and frozen pizzas was the same as everyone else's.

Discovering knowledge that informs us is another step that can build on our motivation. One tool involves learning more about our cognitive style, or how we learn. Our cognitive style consists of our preferred patterns for "gathering information, constructing meaning, and organizing and applying knowledge" (Bennett, 2009). As we explore cognitive styles, we discover that there are differences in how people attend to and perceive the world, explain events, organize the world, and use rules of logic (Nisbett, 2003). Some cultures have a cognitive style that focuses more on tasks, analytic and objective thinking, details and precision, inner direction, and independence, while others focus on relationships and people over tasks and things, concrete and metaphorical thinking, and a group consciousness and harmony.

Developing ICC is a complex learning process. At the basic level of learning, we accumulate knowledge and assimilate it into our existing frameworks. But accumulated knowledge doesn't necessarily help us in situations where we have to apply that knowledge. Transformative learning takes place at the highest levels and occurs when we encounter situations that challenge our accumulated knowledge and our ability to accommodate that knowledge to manage a real-world situation. The cognitive dissonance that results in these situations is often uncomfortable and can lead to a hesitance to repeat such an engagement. One tip for cultivating ICC that can help manage these challenges is to find a community of like-minded people who are also motivated to develop ICC. In my graduate program, I lived in the international dormitory in order to experience the cultural diversity that I had enjoyed so much studying abroad a few years earlier. I was surrounded by international students and US American students who were more or less interested in cultural diversity. This ended up being a tremendous learning experience, and I worked on research about identity and communication between international and American students.

Developing skills that enable us is another part of ICC. Some of the skills important to ICC are the ability to empathize, accumulate cultural information, listen, resolve conflict, and manage anxiety (Bennett, 2009). Again, you are already developing a foundation for these skills by reading this book, but you can expand those skills to intercultural settings with the motivation and knowledge already described. Contact alone does not increase intercultural skills; there must be more deliberate measures taken to fully capitalize on those encounters. While research now shows that intercultural contact does decrease prejudices, this is not enough to become interculturally competent. The ability to empathize and manage anxiety enhances prejudice reduction, and these two skills have been shown to enhance the overall impact of intercultural contact even more than acquiring cultural knowledge. There is intercultural training available for people who are interested. If you can't access training, you may choose to research intercultural training on your own, as there are many books, articles, and manuals written on the subject.

Reflective practices can also help us process through rewards and challenges associated with developing ICC. As we open ourselves to new experiences, we are likely to have both positive and negative reactions. It can be very useful to take note of negative or defensive reactions you have. This can help you identify certain triggers that may create barriers to effective intercultural interaction. Noting positive experiences can also help you identify triggers for learning that you could seek out or recreate to enhance the positive (Bednarz, 2010). A more complex method of reflection is called intersectional reflexivity. Intersectional reflexivity is a reflective practice by which we acknowledge intersecting identities, both privileged and disadvantaged, and implicate ourselves in social hierarchies and inequalities (Jones Jr., 2010). This method brings in the concepts of dominant and nondominant groups and the privileges/disadvantages dialectic we discussed earlier.

While formal intercultural experiences like studying abroad or volunteering for the Special Olympics or a shelter for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer (GLBTQ) youth can result in learning, informal experiences are also important. We may be less likely to include informal experiences in our reflection if we don't see them as legitimate. Reflection should also include "critical incidents" or what I call "a-ha! moments." Think of reflection as a tool for metacompetence that can be useful in bringing the formal and informal together (Bednarz, 2010).

“Getting Competent”

Thinking under the Influence

Communication and culture scholar Brenda Allen coined the phrase “thinking under the influence” (TUI) to highlight a reflective process that can help us hone our intercultural communication competence (Allen, 2011). As we discussed earlier, being mindful is an important part of building competence. Once we can become aware of our thought processes and behaviors, we can more effectively monitor and intervene in them. She asks us to monitor our thoughts and feelings about other people, both similar to and different from us. As we monitor, we should try to identify instances when we are guilty of TUI, such as uncritically accepting the dominant belief systems, relying on stereotypes, or prejudging someone based on their identities. She recounts seeing a picture on the front of the newspaper with three men who appeared Latino. She found herself wondering what they had done, and then found out from the caption that they were the relatives of people who died in a car crash. She identified that as a TUI moment and asked herself if she would have had the same thought if they had been black, white, Asian, or female. When we feel “surprised” by someone different, this often points to a preexisting negative assumption that we can unpack and learn from. Allen also found herself surprised when a panelist at a conference who used a wheelchair and was hearing impaired made witty comments. Upon reflection, she realized that she had an assumption that people with disabilities would have a gloomy outlook on life. While these examples focus on out-groups, she also notes that it's important for people, especially in nondominant groups, to monitor their thoughts about their own group, as they may have internalized negative attitudes about their group from the dominant culture. As a black woman, she notes that she has been critical of black people who "do not speak mainstream English" based on stereotypes she internalized about race, language, and intelligence. It is not automatically a bad thing to TUI. Even Brenda Allen, an accomplished and admirable scholar of culture and communication, catches herself doing it. When we notice that we TUI, it's important to reflect on that moment and try to adjust our thinking processes. This is an ongoing process, but it is an easy-to-remember way to cultivate your ICC. Keep a record of instances where you catch yourself "thinking under the influence" and answer the following questions:

1. What triggers you to TUI?
2. Where did these influences on your thought come from?
3. What concepts from this chapter can you apply to change your thought processes?

Key Takeaways

- Getting integrated: Intercultural communication competence (ICC) is the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in various cultural contexts. ICC also has the potential to benefit you in academic, professional, personal, and civic contexts.

- A person with appropriate intrinsic or extrinsic motivation to engage in intercultural communication can develop self- and other-knowledge that will contribute to their ability to be mindful of their own communication and tolerate uncertain situations.
- We can cultivate ICC by fostering attitudes that motivate us, discovering knowledge that informs us, and developing skills that enable us.

Exercises

1. Identify an intercultural encounter in which you did not communicate as competently as you would have liked. What concept(s) from the chapter would have helped you in this situation and how?
2. Which of the following components of ICC—motivation, mindfulness, cognitive flexibility, and tolerance for uncertainty—do you think you are most competent at, and which one needs the most work? Identify how you became so competent at the first one and some ways that you can improve the second one.
3. Choose one of the three ways discussed to cultivate ICC and make a list of five steps you can take to enhance this part of your competence.

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1.5 Cultural Characteristics and Communication

1.5 Cultural Characteristics and Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Differentiate between Edward T. Hall's low-context and highcontext cultures.
2. Explain the importance of Geert Hofstede's research in cultural studies.
3. Summarize the importance of Stella Ting-Toomey's face and facework in interpersonal relationships.

In any major area of academic study, there are luminaries that one should understand. A luminary is an expert who sheds light on a subject and inspires and influences others' work in that area. In this section, we're going to examine three important luminaries that have helped shape our understanding of culture and intercultural communication: Edward T. Hall, Geert Hofsteded, and Stella Ting-Toomey.

Edward T. Hall

One of the earliest researchers in the area of cultural differences and their importance to communication was a researcher by the name of Edward T. Hall. His book *Beyond Culture* is still considered one of the most influential books for the field of intercultural communication.[17,18] According to Hall, all cultures incorporate both verbal and nonverbal elements into communication. In his 1959 book, *The Silent Language*, Hall states, "culture is communication and communication is culture."[19] In the previous chapter, we talked about the importance of nonverbal communication. We also mentioned that nonverbal communication isn't exactly universal. Some gestures can mean wildly different things in different parts of the world. President George H. Bush once held up his hand in a "V" for Victory salute to an Australian audience only to find out later that this was the equivalent of the middle finger in the United States. President Nixon did the same thing existing an airplane in Brazil flashing his famous OK sign with his thumb and forefinger forming a circle, but this is the "middle finger" in that culture. Obviously, these two incidents have gone down in the annals of presidential history as cultural faux pas. Still, they illustrate the importance of knowing and understanding gestures in differing cultures because we do not all interpret nonverbal behavior the same way.

One of Halls most essential contributions to the field of intercultural communication is the idea of low-context and high-context cultures. The terms "low-context culture" (LCC) and "high-context culture" (HCC) were created by Hall to describe how communication styles differ across cultures. In essence, "in LCC, meaning is expressed through explicit verbal messages, both written and oral. In HCC, on the other hand, intention or meaning can best be conveyed through implicit contexts, including gestures, social customs, silence, nuance, or tone of voice." 20 Table 6.1 further explores the differences between low-context and high-context cultures. In Table 6.1, we broke down issues of context into three general categies: communication, cultural orientation, and business.

Table 6.1 Low-Context vs. High-Context Cultures

	Low-Context	High-Contex
Communication		
Type of Communication	Explicit Communication	Implicit Com
Communication Focus	Focus on Verbal Communication	Focus on Non Communicat
Context of Message	Less Meaningful	Very Meanin
Politeness	Not Important	Very Importa
Approach to People	Direct and Confrontational	Indirect and
Cultural Orientation		
Emotions	No Room for Emotions	Emotions Ha
Approach to Time	Monochromatic	Polychromat
Time Orientation	Present-Future	Past
In/Out-Groups	Flexible and Transient Grouping Patterns	Strong Distin Out-Groups
Identity	Based on Individual	Based on Soc
Values	Independence and Freedom	Tradition an

Business		
Work Style	Individualistic	Team-Orient
Work Approach	Task-Oriented	Relationship-
Business Approach	Competitive	Cooperative
Learning	Knowledge is Transferable	Knowledge is
Sales Orientation	Hard Sell	Soft Sell
View of Change	Change over Tradition	Tradition ove

Geert Hofstede

Another very important researcher in the area of culture is a man by the name of Geert Hofstede. Starting in the 1970s, Geert became interested in how people from different cultures approach work. His interests ultimately culminated in his 1980 publication *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values* where he explained some basic cultural differences.[22] Over the years, Geert has fine-tuned his theory of culture, and the most recent update to his theory occurred in 2010.[23] In Geert's research examining thousands of workers from around the globe, he has noticed a series of six cultural differences: low vs. high power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, low vs. high uncertainty avoidance, long-term vs. short-term orientation, and indulgence vs. restraint. Let's briefly look at each of these.

Low vs. High Power Distance

The first of Geert Hofstede's original dimensions of national cultures was power distance, or the degree to which those people and organizations with less power within a culture accept and expect that power is unequally distributed within their culture. To determine power differences within a culture, Hofstede

originally was able to examine cultural value survey data that had been collected by IBM. Over the years, Hofstede and his fellow researchers have regularly collected additional data from around the world to make his conceptualization of six cultural differences one of the most widely studied concepts of culture. When it comes to power distances, these differences often manifest themselves in many ways within a singular culture: class, education, occupations, and health care. With class, many cultures have three clear segments low, middle, and upper. However, the concepts of what is low, middle, and upper can have very large differences. For example, the median income for the average U.S. household is $51,100.[24] When discussing household incomes, we use the median (middlemost number) because it's the most accurate representation of income. According to a 2013 report from the U.S. Census department (using income data from 2012), here is how income inequality in the U.S. looks:

> Households in the lowest quintile had incomes of $20,599 or less in 2012. Households in the second quintile had incomes between $20,600 and $39,764, those in the third quintile had incomes between $39,765 and $64,582, and those in the fourth quintile had incomes between $64,583 and $104,096.

Households in the highest quintile had incomes of $104,097 or more. The top 5 percent had incomes of $191,157 or more.[25]

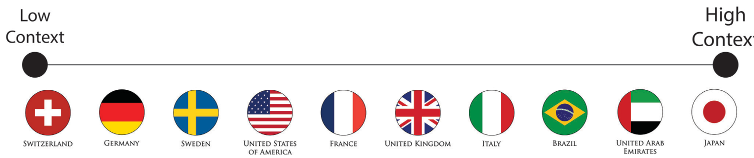

Image by Jason S on Flickr

However, income is just one indicatory of power distance within a culture. Others are who gets educated and what type of education they receive, who gets health care and what type, and what types of occupations do those with power have versus those who do not have power. According to Hofstede's most recent data, the five countries with the highest power distances are: Malaysia, Slovakia, Guatemala, Panama, and the Philippines.[26] The five countries with the lowest power distances are Austria, Israel, Denmark, New Zealand, and Switzerland (German-speaking part). Notice that the U.S. does not make it into the top five or the bottom five. According to Hofstede's data, the U.S. is 16th from the bottom of power distance, so we are in the bottom third with regards to power distance. When it comes down to it, despite the issues we have in our country, the power disparity is not nearly as significant as it is in many other parts of our world.

Individualism vs. Collectivism

The United States is number one on individualism, according to Hofstede's data.[27] Americans are considered individualistic. In other words, we think about ourselves as individuals rather than the collective group. Most Asian countries are considered collectivistic cultures because these cultures tend to be group-focused. Collectivistic cultures tend to think about actions that might affect the entire group rather than specific members of the group.

In an individualistic culture, there is a belief that you can do what you want and follow your passions.

In an individualistic culture, if someone asked what you do for a living, they would answer by saying their profession or occupation. However, in collectivistic cultures, a person would answer in terms of the group, organization, and/or corporation that they serve. Moreover, in a collectivistic culture, there is a belief that you should do what benefits the group. In other words, collectivistic cultures focus on how the group can grow and be productive.

Masculinity vs. Femininity

The notion of masculinity and femininity are often misconstrued to be tied to their biological sex counterparts, female and male. For understanding culture, Hofstede acknowledges that this distinction ultimately has a lot to do with work goals.[28] On the masculine end of the spectrum, individuals tend to be focused on items like earnings, recognition, advancement, and challenge. Hofstede also refers to these tendencies as being more assertive. Femininity, on the other hand, involves characteristics like having a good working relationship with one's manager and coworkers, cooperating with people at work, and security (both job and familial). Hofstede refers to this as being more relationally oriented. Admittedly, in Hofstede's research, there does tend to be a difference between females and males on these characteristics (females tend to be more relationally oriented and males more assertive), which is why Hofstede went with the terms masculinity and femininity in the first place. Ultimately, we can define these types of cultures in the following way:

> *A society is called masculine when emotional gender roles are clearly distinct: men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success, whereas women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with quality of life.*
>
> *A society is called feminine when emotional gender roles overlap: both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with quality of life* [emphasis in original]. [29]

The top five most masculine countries are Slovakia, Japan, Hungary, Austria, and Venezuela (the U.S. is number 19 out of 76); whereas, feminine countries are represented by Sweden, Norway, Latvia,

Netherlands, and Denmark. As you can imagine, depending on the type of culture you live in, you will have wildly different social interactions with other people. There's also a massive difference in the approach to marriage. In masculine cultures, women are the caretakers of the home, while men are to be healthy and wealthy. As such, women are placed in a subservient position to their husbands are often identified socially by their husbands. For example, an invitation to a party would be addressed to "Mr. and Mrs. John Smith." In feminine cultures, men and women are upheld to the same standards, and their relationships should be based on mutual friendship.

Low vs. High Uncertainty Avoidance

The next category identified by Hofstede involves the concept of uncertainty avoidance. [30] Life is full of uncertainty. We cannot escape it; however, some people are more prone to becoming fearful in situations that are ambiguous or unknown. Uncertainty avoidance then involves the extent to which cultures as a whole are fearful of ambiguous and unknown situations. People in cultures with high uncertainty avoidance can view this ambiguity and lack of knowledge as threatening, which is one reason why people in these cultures tend to have higher levels of anxiety and neuroticism as a whole. In fact, within the latest edition of the book examining these characteristics, Hofstede and his colleagues title the chapter on uncertainty avoidance as "What is Different is Dangerous," calling out the threat factor people in high uncertainty avoidance cultures feel. [31] Cultures at the high end of uncertainty avoidance include Greece, Portugal, Guatemala, Uruguay, and Belgium Flemish; whereas, cultures at the low end of uncertainty avoidance include Singapore, Jamaica, Denmark, Sweden, and Hong Kong. The United States ranks 64th out of 76 countries analyzed (Singapore was number 76). From an interpersonal perspective, people from high uncertainty avoidant cultures are going to have a lot more anxiety associated with interactions involving people from other cultures. Furthermore, there tend to be higher levels of prejudice and higher levels of ideological, political, and religious fundamentalism, which does not allow for any kind of debate.

Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation

In addition to the previous characteristics, Hofstede noticed a fifth characteristic of cultures that he deemed long-term and short-term orientation. Long-term orientation focuses on the future and not the present or the past. As such, there is a focus on both persistence and thrift. The emphasis on endurance is vital because being persistent today will help you in the future. The goal is to work hard now, so you can have the payoff later. The same is true of thrift. We want to conserve our resources and under- spend to build that financial cushion for the future. Short-term oriented cultures, on the other hand, tend to focus on both the past and the present. In these cultures, there tends to be high respect for the past and the various traditions that have made that culture great. Additionally, there is a strong emphasis on "saving face," which we will discuss more in the next section, fulfilling one's obligations today, and enjoying one's leisure time. At the long-term end of the spectrum are countries like China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Japan; whereas, countries like Pakistan, Czech Republic, Nigeria, Spain, and the Philippines are examples of short-term. The United States ranked 31 out of 39, with Pakistan being number 39.

Interpersonally, long-term oriented countries were more satisfied with their contributions to "Being attentive to daily human relations, deepening human bonds in family, neighborhood and friends or acquaintances" when compared to their short-term counterparts. [32]

Indulgence vs. Restraint

The final characteristic of cultures is a new one first reported on in the 2010 edition of *Cultures and Organizations*. [33] The sixth cultural characteristic is called indulgence vs. restraint, which examines issues of happiness and wellbeing. According to Hofstede and his coauthors, "Indulgence stands for a tendency to allow relatively free gratification of basic and natural human desires related to enjoying life and having fun. Its opposite pole, restraint, reflects a conviction that such gratification needs to be curbed and regulated by strict social norms." [34] The top five on the Indulgence end are Venezuela, Mexico, Puerto Rico, El Salvador, and Nigeria, whereas those on the restraint end are Pakistan, Egypt, Latvia, Ukraine, and Albania. The U.S. is towards the indulgence end of the spectrum and ranks at #15 along with Canada and the Netherlands. Some interesting findings associated with indulgence include experiencing higher levels of positive emotions and remembering those emotions for more extended periods. Furthermore, individuals from more indulgent cultures tend to be more optimistic, while their restrained counterparts tend to be more cynical. People in more indulgent countries are going to be happier than their restrained counterparts, and people within indulgent cultures show lower rates of cardiovascular problems commonly associated with stress. Finally, individuals from indulgent cultures tend to be more extraverted and outgoing as a whole, whereas individuals from restrained cultures tend to be more neurotic. From years of research examining both extraversion and neuroticism, we know that extraverted individuals have more successful interpersonal relationships than those who are highly neurotic. Ultimately, research examining these differences have shown that people from indulgent countries are more open to other cultures, more satisfied with their lives, and are more likely to communicate with friends and family members via the Internet while interacting with more people from other cultures via the Internet as well.

Research Spotlight

In 2017, Daniel H. Mansson and Aldís G. Sigurðardóttir set out to examine the concept of trait affection in relation to Hofstede's theoretical framework.

"Affectionate communication is conceptualized as a person's use of intentional and overt communicative behaviors to convey feelings of closeness, care, and fondness in the form of verbal statements, nonverbal behaviors, and social support."[35]

For this study, the researchers studied 606 participants in four different countries: Denmark, Iceland, Poland, and the United States.

When it came to trait affection given, the United States participants reported giving more affection than any of the three other countries. The other countries did not differ from each other with regard to trait affection given.

When it came to trait affection received, all four groups differed from one another. The order of affection received was (in order of the most trait affection received) United States, Denmark, Poland, and Iceland.

Finally, the researchers examined affection given and received with regards to Hofstede's work. "The results also indicated that trait affection given was significantly associated with the individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, and uncertainty avoidance dimensions of cultures. Similarly, trait affection received was significantly associated with the individualism-collectivism and uncertainty avoidance dimensions of cultures." [36]

Mansson, D. H., & Sigurðardóttir, A. G. (2017). Trait affection given and received: A test of Hofstede's theoretical framework. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 46(2), 161-172. https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2017.1292944

What is Face?

The concept of **face** is one that is not the easiest to define nor completely understand. Originally, the concept of face is not a Western even though the idea of "saving face" is pretty common in every day talk today. According to Hsien Chin Hu, the concept of face stems from two distinct Chinese words, *lien* and *mien-tzu*.[45] *Lien* "represents the confidence of society in the integrity of ego's moral character, the loss of which makes it impossible for him to function properly within the community. Lien is both a social sanction for enforcing moral standards and an internalized sanction."[46] On the other hand, *mien-tzu* "stands for the kind of prestige that is emphasized in this country [America]: a reputation achieved through getting on in life, through success and ostentation."[47] However, David Yau-fai Ho argues that face is more complicated than just lien and mien-tzu, so he provided the following definition:

> Face is the respectability and/or deference which a person can claim for himself from others, by virtue of the relative position he occupies in his social network and the degree to which he is judged to have functioned adequately in that position as well as acceptably in his general conduct; the face extended to a person by others is a function of the degree of congruence between judgments of his total condition in life, including his actions as well as those of people closely associated with him, and the social expectations that others have placed upon him. In terms of two interacting parties,

> face is the reciprocated compliance, respect, and/or deference that each party expects from, and extends to, the other party.[48]

More simplistically, face is essentially “a person’s reputation and feelings of prestige within multiple spheres, including the workplace, the family, personal friends, and society at large.”[49] For our purposes, we can generally break face down into general categories: face gaining and face losing. Face gaining refers to the strategies a person might use to build their reputation and feelings of prestige (e.g., talking about accomplishments, active social media presence), whereas face losing refers to those behaviors someone engages in that can harm their reputation or feelings of prestige (e.g., getting caught in a lie, failing).

Key Takeaways

- Low-context cultures are cultures where the emphasis is placed on the words that come out of an individual’s mouth. High-context cultures, on the other hand, are cultures where understanding a message is dependent on the cultural context and a communicator's nonverbal behavior.

- Geert Hofstede's research created a taxonomy for understanding and differentiating cultures. Geert's taxonomy was originally based on data collected by IBM, and he found that cultures could be differentiated by power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term vs. short- term orientation, and indulgence vs. restraint.
- Face is the standing or position a person has in the eyes of others. During an interpersonal interaction, individuals strive to create a positive version of their face for the other person.

Exercises

1. Compare and contrast two countries and their levels of context. Why do you think context is such an important cultural characteristic?
2. Think about a co-cultural group that you belong to.

Think through Geert Hofstede's six categories used to evaluate differing cultures and apply Hofstede's ideas to your co-culture. Does your co-culture differ from the dominant culture?

3. Imagine you're having an interaction with an individual from India. During the middle of the conversation, you have a feeling that your interactional partner is losing face. What could you do at that point to help rebuild that person's face? Why would you want to do this at all?

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PART II

CHAPTER 2: COMMUNICATION AND PERCEPTION

As we go through our daily lives we perceive all sorts of people and objects, and we often make sense of these perceptions by using previous experiences to help filter and organize the information we take in. Sometimes we encounter new or contradictory information that changes the way we think about a person, group, or object. The perceptions that we make of others and that others make of us affect how we communicate and act. In this chapter, we will learn about the perception process, how we perceive others, how we perceive and present ourselves, and how we can improve our perceptions.

2.1 Perception Process

Learning Objectives

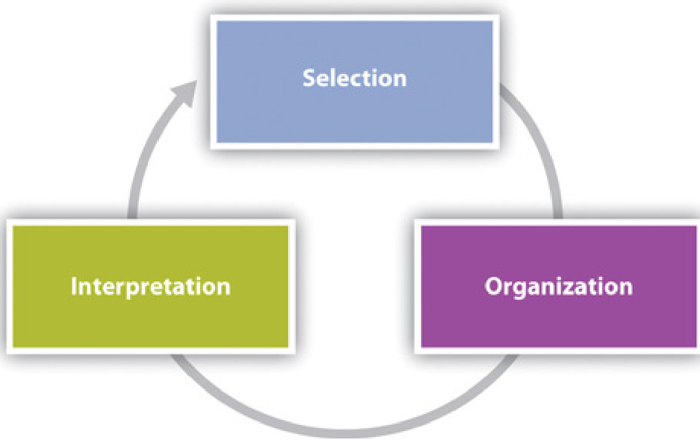
1. Define perception.
2. Discuss how salience influences the selection of perceptual information.
3. Explain the ways in which we organize perceptual information.
4. Discuss the role of schemata in the interpretation of perceptual information.

Perception is the process of selecting, organizing, and interpreting information. This process, which is shown in Figure 2.1 "The Perception Process", includes the perception of select stimuli that pass through our perceptual filters, are organized into our existing structures and patterns, and are then interpreted based on previous experiences. Although perception is a largely cognitive and psychological process, how we perceive the people and objects around us affects our communication. We respond differently to an object or person that we perceive favorably than we do to something we find unfavorable. But how do we filter through the mass amounts of incoming information, organize it, and make meaning from what makes it through our perceptual filters and into our social realities?

Selecting Information

We take in information through all five of our senses, but our perceptual field (the world around us) includes so many stimuli that it is impossible for our brains to process and make sense of it all. So, as information comes in through our senses, various factors influence what actually continues on through the perception process (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). *Selecting* is the first part of the perception process, in which we focus our attention on certain incoming sensory information. Think about how, out of many other possible stimuli to pay attention to, you may hear a familiar voice in the hallway, see a pair of shoes you want to buy from across the mall, or smell something cooking for dinner when you get home from work. We quickly cut through and push to the background all kinds of sights, smells, sounds, and other stimuli, but how do we decide what to select and what to leave out?

Figure 2.1 The Perception Process



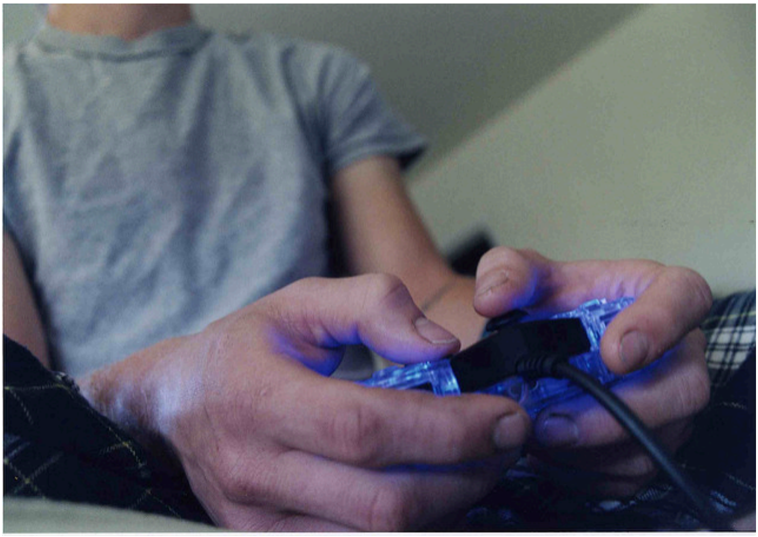
We tend to pay attention to information that is salient. *Salience* is the degree to which something attracts our attention in a particular context. The thing attracting our attention can be abstract, like a concept, or concrete, like an object. For example, a person's identity as a Native American may become salient when they are protesting at the Columbus Day parade in Denver, Colorado. Or a bright flashlight shining in your face while camping at night is sure to be salient. The degree of salience depends on three features (Fiske & Tayor, 1991). We tend to find salient things that are visually or aurally stimulating and things that meet our needs or interests. Lastly, expectations affect what we find salient.

Visual and Aural Stimulation

It is probably not surprising to learn that visually and/or aurally stimulating things become salient in our perceptual field and get our attention. Creatures ranging from fish to hummingbirds are attracted to things like silver spinners on fishing poles or red and yellow bird feeders. Having our senses stimulated isn't always a positive thing though. Think about the couple that won't stop talking during the movie or the upstairs neighbor whose subwoofer shakes your ceiling at night. In short, stimuli can be attention-getting in a productive or distracting way. As communicators, we can use this knowledge to our benefit by minimizing distractions when we have something important to say. It's probably better to have a serious conversation with a significant other in a quiet place rather than a crowded food court. As a public speaker, altering the rate, volume, and pitch of your voice, known as vocal variety, can help keep your audience engaged, as can gestures and movement. Conversely, nonverbal adaptors, or nervous movements we do to relieve anxiety like pacing or twirling our hair, can be distracting. Aside from minimizing distractions and delivering our messages enthusiastically, the content of our communication also affects salience.

Needs and Interests

We tend to pay attention to information that we perceive to meet our needs or interests in some way. This type of selective attention can help us meet instrumental needs and get things done. When you need to speak with a financial aid officer about your scholarships and loans, you sit in the waiting room and listen for your name to be called. Paying close attention to whose name is called means you can be ready to start your meeting and hopefully get your business handled. When we don't think certain messages meet our needs, stimuli that would normally get our attention may be completely lost. Imagine you are in the grocery store and you hear someone say your name. You turn around, only to hear that person say, "Finally! I said your name three times. I thought you forgot who I was!" A few seconds before, when you were focused on figuring out which kind of orange juice to get, you were attending to the various pulp options to the point that you tuned other stimuli out, even something as familiar as the sound of someone calling your name. Whether a sign helps us find the nearest gas station, the sound of a ringtone helps us find our missing cell phone, or a speaker tells us how avoiding processed foods will improve our health, we select and attend to information that meets our needs.



If you're engrossed in an interesting video game, you may not notice other perceptual cues.

R Pollard – tex playing video games – CC BY 2.0.

We also find salient information that interests us. Of course, many times, stimuli that meet our needs are also interesting, but it's worth discussing these two items separately because sometimes we find things interesting that don't necessarily meet our needs. I'm sure we've all gotten sucked into a television show, video game, or random project and paid attention to that at the expense of something that actually meets our needs like cleaning or spending time with a significant other. Paying attention to things that interest us but don't meet specific needs seems like the basic formula for procrastination that we are all familiar with.

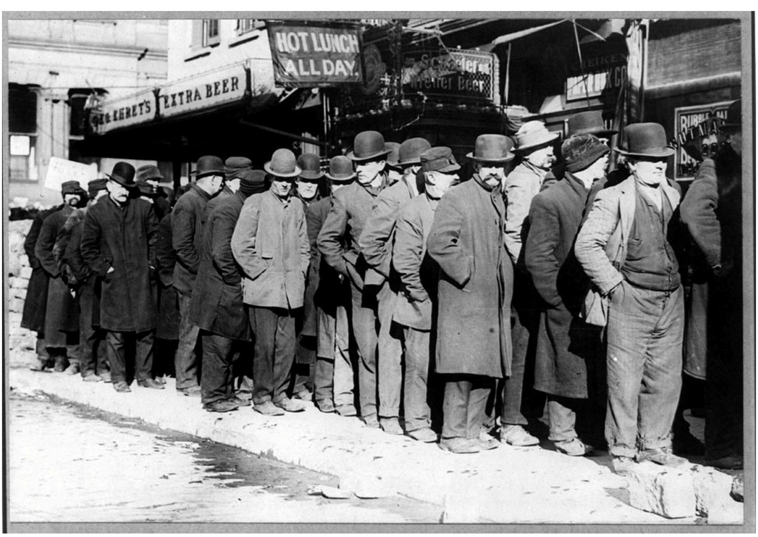
In many cases, we know what interests us and we automatically gravitate toward stimuli that match up with that. For example, as you filter through radio stations, you likely already have an idea of what kind of music interests you and will stop on a station playing something in that genre while skipping right past stations playing something you aren't interested in. Because of this tendency, we often have to end up being forced into or accidentally experiencing something new in order to create or discover new interests. For example, you may not realize you are interested in Asian history until you are required to take such a course and have an engaging professor who sparks that interest in you. Or you may accidentally stumble on a new area of interest when you take a class you wouldn't otherwise because it fits into your schedule.

Expectations

The relationship between salience and expectations is a little more complex. Basically, we can find expected things salient and find things that are unexpected salient. While this may sound confusing, a couple of examples should illustrate this point. If you are expecting a package to be delivered, you might pick up on the slightest noise of a truck engine or someone's footsteps approaching your front door. Since we expect something to happen, we may be extra tuned in to clues that it is coming. In terms of the unexpected, if you have a shy and soft-spoken friend who you overhear raising the volume and pitch of his voice while talking to another friend, you may pick up on that and assume that something out of the ordinary is going on. For something unexpected to become salient, it has to reach a certain threshold of difference. If you walked into your regular class and there were one or two more students there than normal, you may not even notice. If you walked into your class and there was someone dressed up as a wizard, you would probably notice. So, if we expect to experience something out of the routine, like package delivery, we will find stimuli related to that expectation salient. If we experience something that we weren't expecting and that is significantly different from our routine experiences, then we will likely find it salient. We can also apply this concept to our communication.

Organizing Information

Organizing is the second part of the perception process, in which we sort and categorize information that we perceive based on innate and learned cognitive patterns. Three ways we sort things into patterns are by using proximity, similarity, and difference (Coren, 1980). In terms of proximity, we tend to think that things that are close together go together. For example, have you ever been waiting to be helped in a business and the clerk assumes that you and the person standing beside you are together? The slightly awkward moment usually ends when you and the other person in line look at each other, then back at the clerk, and one of you explains that you are not together. Even though you may have never met that other person in your life, the clerk used a basic perceptual organizing cue to group you together because you were standing in proximity to one another.



Since we organize perceptual information based on proximity, a person may perceive that two people are together, just because they are standing close together in a line.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

We also group things together based on similarity. We tend to think similar-looking or similar-acting things belong together. I have two friends that I occasionally go out with, and we are all three males, around the same age, of the same race, with short hair and glasses. Aside from that, we don't really look alike, but on more than one occasion a server at a restaurant has assumed that we're brothers. Despite the fact that many of our other features are different, the salient features are organized based on similarity, and the three of us are suddenly related.

We also organize information that we take in based on difference. In this case, we assume that the item that looks or acts differently from the rest doesn't belong with the group. Perceptual errors involving people and assumptions of difference can be especially awkward, if not offensive. My friend's mother, who is Vietnamese American, was attending a conference at which another attendee assumed she was a hotel worker and asked her to throw something away for her. In this case, my friend's mother was a person of color at a convention with mostly white attendees, so an impression was formed based on the other person's perception of this difference.

These strategies for organizing information are so common that they are built into how we teach our children basic skills and how we function in our daily lives. I'm sure we all had to look at pictures in grade school and determine which things went together and which thing didn't belong. If you think of the literal act of organizing something, like your desk at home or work, we follow these same strategies. If you have a bunch of papers and mail on the top of your desk, you will likely sort papers into separate piles for separate classes or put bills in a separate place than personal mail. You may have one drawer for pens, pencils, and other supplies and another drawer for files. In this case, you are grouping items based on similarities and differences. You may also group things based on proximity, for example, by putting financial items like your checkbook, a calculator, and your pay stubs in one area so you can update your budget efficiently. In summary, we simplify information and look for patterns to help us more efficiently communicate and get through life.

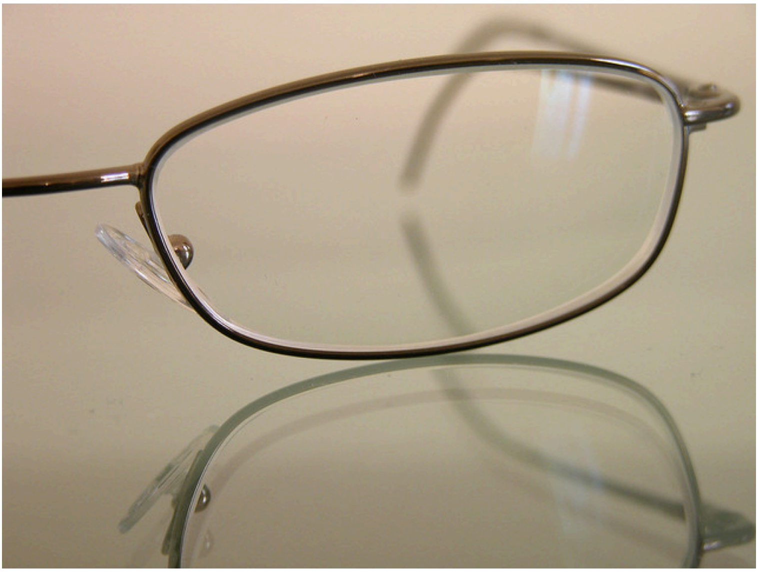
Simplification and categorizing based on patterns isn't necessarily a bad thing. In fact, without this capability, we would likely not have the ability to speak, read, or engage in other complex cognitive/behavioral functions. Our brain innately categorizes and files information and experiences away for later retrieval, and different parts of the brain are responsible for different sensory experiences. In short, it is natural for things to group together in some ways. There are differences among people, and looking for patterns helps us in many practical ways. However, the judgments we place on various patterns and categories are not natural; they are learned and culturally and contextually relative. Our perceptual patterns do become unproductive and even unethical when the judgments we associate with certain patterns are based on stereotypical or prejudicial thinking.

We also organize interactions and interpersonal experiences based on our firsthand experiences. When two people experience the same encounter differently, misunderstandings and conflict may result. *Punctuation* refers to the structuring of information into a timeline to determine the cause (stimulus) and effect (response) of our communication interactions (Sillars, 1980). Applying this concept to interpersonal conflict can help us see how the perception process extends beyond the individual to the interpersonal level. This concept also helps illustrate how organization and interpretation can happen together and how interpretation can influence how we organize information and vice versa.

Where does a conflict begin and end? The answer to this question depends on how the people involved in the conflict punctuate, or structure, their conflict experience. Punctuation differences can often escalate conflict, which can lead to a variety of relationship problems (Watzlawick, Bavelas, & Jackson, 1967). For example, Linda and Joe are on a project team at work and have a deadline approaching. Linda has been working on the project over the weekend in anticipation of her meeting with Joe first thing Monday morning. She has had some questions along the way and has e-mailed Joe for clarification and input, but he hasn't responded. On Monday morning, Linda walks into the meeting room, sees Joe, and says, "I've been working on this project all weekend and needed your help. I e-mailed you three times! What were you doing?" Joe responds, "I had no idea you e-mailed me. I was gone all weekend on a camping trip." In this instance, the conflict started for Linda two days ago and has just started for Joe. So, for the two of them to most effectively manage this conflict, they need to communicate so that their punctuation, or where the conflict started for each one, is clear and matches up. In this example, Linda made an impression about Joe's level of commitment to the project based on an interpretation she made after selecting and organizing incoming information. Being aware of punctuation is an important part of perception checking, which we will discuss later. Let's now take a closer look at how interpretation plays into the perception process.

Interpreting Information

Although selecting and organizing incoming stimuli happens very quickly, and sometimes without much conscious thought, interpretation can be a much more deliberate and conscious step in the perception process. *Interpretation* is the third part of the perception process, in which we assign meaning to our experiences using mental structures known as schemata. Schemata are like databases of stored, related information that we use to interpret new experiences. We all have fairly complicated schemata that have developed over time as small units of information combine to make more meaningful complexes of information.



Schemata are like lenses that help us make sense of the perceptual cues around us based on previous knowledge and experience.

We have an overall schema about education and how to interpret experiences with teachers and classmates. This schema started developing before we even went to preschool based on things that parents, peers, and the media told us about school. For example, you learned that certain symbols and objects like an apple, a ruler, a calculator, and a notebook are associated with being a student or teacher. You learned new concepts like grades and recess, and you engaged in new practices like doing homework, studying, and taking tests. You also formed new relationships with teachers, administrators, and classmates. As you progressed through your education, your schema adapted to the changing environment. How smooth or troubling schema reevaluation and revision is varies from situation to situation and person to person. For example, some students adapt their schema relatively easily as they move from elementary, to middle, to high school, and on to college and are faced with new expectations for behavior and academic engagement. Other students don't adapt as easily, and holding onto their old schema creates problems as they try to interpret new information through old, incompatible schema. We've all been in a similar situation at some point in our lives, so we know that revising our schemata can be stressful and that such revision takes effort and usually involves some mistakes, disappointments, and frustrations. But being able to adapt our schemata is a sign of cognitive complexity, which is an important part of communication competence. So, even though the process may be challenging, it can also be a time for learning and growth.

It's important to be aware of schemata because our interpretations affect our behavior. For example, if you are doing a group project for class and you perceive a group member to be shy based on your schema of how shy people communicate, you may avoid giving him presentation responsibilities in your group project because you do not think shy people make good public speakers. Schemata also guide our interactions, providing a script for our behaviors. We know, in general, how to act and communicate in a waiting room, in a classroom, on a first date, and on a game show. Even a person who has never been on a game show can develop a schema for how to act in that environment by watching *The Price Is Right*, for example. People go to great lengths to make shirts with clever sayings or act enthusiastically in hopes of being picked to be a part of the studio audience and hopefully become a contestant on the show.

We often include what we do for a living in our self-introductions, which then provides a schema through which others interpret our communication.

David Weekly – Professions! – CC BY 2.0.

As we have seen, schemata are used to interpret others' behavior and form impressions about who they are as a person. To help this process along, we often solicit information from people to help us place them into a preexisting schema. In the United States and many other Western cultures, people's identities are often closely tied to what they do for a living. When we introduce others, or ourselves, occupation is usually one of the first things we mention. Think about how your communication with someone might differ if he or she were introduced to you as an artist versus a doctor. We make similar interpretations based on where people are from, their age, their race, and other social and cultural factors. We will learn more about how culture, gender, and other factors influence our perceptions as we continue through the chapter. In summary, we have schemata about individuals, groups, places, and things, and these schemata filter our perceptions before, during, and after interactions. As schemata are retrieved from memory, they are executed, like computer programs or apps on your smartphone, to help us interpret the world around us. Just like computer programs and apps must be regularly updated to improve their functioning, competent communicators update and adapt their schemata as they have new experiences.

"Getting Real"

Police Officers, Schemata, and Perception/Interpretation

Prime-time cable and network television shows like the *Law and Order* franchise and *Southland* have long offered viewers a glimpse into the lives of law enforcement officers. COPS, the first and longest-running prime-time reality television show, and newer reality-themed and educational shows like *The First* 48 and *Lockdown*, offer a more realistic look into techniques used by law enforcement. Perception is a crucial part of an officer's skill set. Specifically, during police-citizen encounters, where tensions may be high and time for decision making limited, officers rely on schemata developed through personal experience off the job and training and experience on the job (Rozelle & Baxter, 1975). Moreover, police officers often have to make perceptions based on incomplete and sometimes unreliable information. So, how do police officers use perception to help them do their jobs?

Research has examined how police officers use perception to make judgments about personality traits, credibility, deception, and the presence or absence of a weapon, among others things, and just like you and me, officers use the same process of selection, organization, and interpretation. This research has found that officers, like us, rely on schema to help them make decisions under time and situational constraints. In terms of selection, expectations influence officer perception. At preshift meetings, officers are briefed on ongoing issues and "things to be on the lookout for," which provides them with a set of expectations—for example, the make and model of a stolen car—that can guide their selection process. They must also be prepared for things that defy their expectations, which is not a job skill that many other professionals have to consider every day. They never know when a traffic stop could turn into a pursuit or a seemingly gentle person could turn violent. These expectations can then connect to organizational strategies. For example, if an officer knows to be alert for a criminal suspect, they will actively organize incoming perceptual information into categories based on whether or not people look similar to or different from the suspect description. Proximity also plays into police work. If a person is in a car with a driver who has an unregistered handgun, the officer is likely to assume that the other person also has criminal intent. While these practices are not inherently bad, there are obvious problems that can develop when these patterns become rigid schema. Some research has shown that certain prejudices based on racial schema can lead to perceptual errors—in this case, police officers mistakenly perceiving a weapon in the possession of black suspects more often than white suspects (Payne, 2001). Additionally, racial profiling (think of how profiles are similar to schemata) has become an issue that's gotten much attention since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and the passage of immigration laws in states like Arizona and Alabama that have been critiqued as targeting migrant workers and other undocumented immigrants. As you can see, law enforcement officers and civilians use the same perception process, but such a career brings with it responsibilities and challenges that highlight the imperfect nature of the perception process.

1. What communication skills do you think are key for a law enforcement officer to have in order to do their job effectively and why?
2. Describe an encounter that you have had with a law enforcement officer (if you haven't had a direct experience you can use a hypothetical or fictional example). What were your perceptions of the officer? What do you think his or her perceptions were of you? What schemata do you think contributed to each of your interpretations?
3. What perceptual errors create potential ethical challenges in law enforcement? For example, how should the organizing principles of proximity, similarity, and difference be employed?

Key Takeaways

- Perception is the process of selecting, organizing, and interpreting information. This process affects our communication because we respond to stimuli differently, whether they are objects or persons, based on how we perceive them.

- Given the massive amounts of stimuli taken in by our senses, we only select a portion of the incoming information to organize and interpret. We select information based on salience. We tend to find salient things that are visually or aurally stimulating and things that meet our needs and interests. Expectations also influence what information we select.
- We organize information that we select into patterns based on proximity, similarity, and difference.
- We interpret information using schemata, which allow us to assign meaning to information based on accumulated knowledge and previous experience.

Exercises

1. Take a moment to look around wherever you are right now. Take in the perceptual field around you. What is salient for you in this moment and why? Explain the degree of salience using the three reasons for salience discussed in this section.
2. As we organize information (sensory information, objects, and people) we simplify and categorize information into patterns. Identify some cases in which this aspect of the perception process is beneficial. Identify some cases in which it could be

harmful or negative.

3. Getting integrated: Think about some of the schemata you have that help you make sense of the world around you. For each of the following contexts—academic, professional, personal, and civic—identify a schema that you commonly rely on or think you will rely on. For each schema you identified note a few ways that it has already been challenged or may be challenged in the future.

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2.2 Perceiving Others

Learning Objectives

1. Differentiate between internal and external attributions.
2. Explain two common perceptual errors: the fundamental attribution error and the self-serving bias.
3. Discuss how the primacy and recency effects relate to first and last impressions.
4. Discuss how physical and environmental factors influence perception.
5. Explain the horn and halo effects.
6. Recognize the roles that culture and personality play in the perception of others.

Are you a good judge of character? How quickly can you "size someone up?" Interestingly, research shows that many people are surprisingly accurate at predicting how an interaction with someone will unfold based on initial impressions. Fascinating research has also been done on the ability of people to make a judgment about a person's competence after as little as 100 milliseconds of exposure to politicians' faces. Even more surprising is that people's judgments of competence, after exposure to two candidates for senate elections, accurately predicted election outcomes (Ballew II & Todoroy, 2007). In short, after only minimal exposure to a candidate's facial expressions, people made judgments about the person's competence, and those candidates judged more competent were people who actually won elections! As you read this section, keep in mind that these principles apply to how you perceive others and to how others perceive you. Just as others make impressions on us, we make impressions on others. We have already learned how the perception process works in terms of selecting, organizing, and interpreting. In this section, we will focus on how we perceive others, with specific attention to how we interpret our perceptions of others.

Attribution and Interpretation

I'm sure you have a family member, friend, or coworker with whom you have ideological or political differences. When conversations and inevitable disagreements occur, you may view this person as "pushing your buttons" if you are invested in the issue being debated, or you may view the person as "on their soapbox" if you aren't invested. In either case, your existing perceptions of the other person are probably reinforced after your conversation and you may leave the conversation thinking, "She is never going to wake up and see how ignorant she is! I don't know why I even bother trying to talk to her!" Similar situations occur regularly, and there are some key psychological processes that play into how we perceive others' behaviors. By examining these processes, attribution in particular, we can see how our communication with others is affected by the explanations we create for others' behavior. In addition, we will learn some common errors that we make in the attribution process that regularly lead to conflict and misunderstanding.

Attribution

In most interactions, we are constantly running an attribution script in our minds, which essentially tries to come up with explanations for what is happening. Why did my neighbor slam the door when she saw me walking down the hall? Why is my partner being extra nice to me today? Why did my officemate miss our project team meeting this morning? In general, we seek to attribute the cause of others' behaviors to internal or external factors. *Internal attributions* connect the cause of behaviors to personal aspects such as personality traits. *External attributions* connect the cause of behaviors to situational factors. Attributions are important to consider because our reactions to others' behaviors are strongly influenced by the explanations we reach. Imagine that Gloria and Jerry are dating. One day, Jerry gets frustrated and raises his voice to Gloria. She may find that behavior more offensive and even consider breaking up with him if she attributes the cause of the blow-up to his personality since personality traits are usually fairly stable and difficult to control or change.

Frustrated drivers often use internal attributions to explain other drivers' behaviors.

Beelgin – ROAD RAGE FIST – CC BY 2.0.

Conversely, Gloria may be more forgiving if she attributes the cause of his behavior to situational factors beyond Jerry's control since external factors are usually temporary. If she makes an internal attribution, Gloria may think, "Wow, this person is really a loose cannon. Who knows when he will lose it again?" If she makes an external attribution, she may think, "Jerry has been under a lot of pressure to meet deadlines at work and hasn't been getting much sleep. Once this project is over, I'm sure he'll be more relaxed." This process of attribution is ongoing, and, as with many aspects of perception, we are sometimes aware of the attributions we make, and sometimes they are automatic and/or unconscious. Attribution has received much scholarly attention because it is in this part of the perception process that some of the most common perceptual errors or biases occur.

One of the most common perceptual errors is the *fundamental attribution error*, which refers to our tendency to explain others' behaviors using internal rather than external attributions (Sillars, 1980). For example, when I worked at an urban college in Denver, Colorado, I often had students come into class irritated, saying, "I got a parking ticket! I can't believe those people. Why don't they get a real job and stop ruining my life!" If you Google some clips from the reality television show *Parking Wars*, you will see the ire that people often direct at parking enforcement officers. In this case, illegally parked students attribute the cause of their situation to the malevolence of the parking officer, essentially saying they got a ticket because the officer was a mean/bad person, which is an internal attribution. Students were much less likely to acknowledge that the officer was just doing his or her job (an external attribution) and the ticket was a result of the student's decision to park illegally.

Perceptual errors can also be biased, and in the case of the *self-serving bias*, the error works out in our favor. Just as we tend to attribute others' behaviors to internal rather than external causes, we do the same for ourselves, especially when our behaviors have led to something successful or positive. When our behaviors lead to failure or something negative, we tend to attribute the cause to external factors. Thus the self-serving bias is a perceptual error through which we attribute the cause of our successes to internal personal factors while attributing our failures to external factors beyond our control. When we look at the fundamental attribution error and the self-serving bias together, we can see that we are likely to judge ourselves more favorably than another person, or at least less personally.

The professor-student relationship offers a good case example of how these concepts can play out. I have often heard students who earned an unsatisfactory grade on an assignment attribute that grade to the strictness, unfairness, or incompetence of their professor. I have also heard professors attribute a poor grade to the student's laziness, attitude, or intelligence. In both cases, the behavior is explained using an internal attribution and is an example of the fundamental attribution error. Students may further attribute their poor grade to their busy schedule or other external, situational factors rather than their lack of motivation, interest, or preparation (internal attributions). On the other hand, when students get a good grade on a paper, they will likely attribute that cause to their intelligence or hard work rather than an easy assignment or an "easy grading" professor. Both of these examples illustrate the self-serving bias. These psychological processes have implications for our communication because when we attribute causality to another person's personality, we tend to have a stronger emotional reaction and tend to assume that this personality characteristic is stable, which may lead us to avoid communication with the person or to react negatively. Now that you are aware of these common errors, you can monitor them more and engage in perception checking, which we will learn more about later, to verify your attributions.

Impressions and Interpretation

As we perceive others, we make impressions about their personality, likeability, attractiveness, and other characteristics. Although much of our impressions are personal, what forms them is sometimes based more on circumstances than personal characteristics. All the information we take in isn't treated equally. How important are first impressions? Does the last thing you notice about a person stick with you longer because it's more recent? Do we tend to remember the positive or negative things we notice about a person? This section will help answer these questions, as we explore how the timing of information and the content of the messages we receive can influence our perception.

First and Last Impressions

People who are able to form accurate first impressions tend to have more satisfying relationships and more quickly advance in their careers.

The old saying "You never get a second chance to make a good impression" points to the fact that first impressions matter. The brain is a predictive organ in that it wants to know, based on previous experiences and patterns, what to expect next, and first impressions function to fill this need, allowing us to determine how we will proceed with an interaction after only a quick assessment of the person with whom we are interacting (Hargie, 2011). Research shows that people are surprisingly good at making accurate first impressions about how an interaction will unfold and at identifying personality characteristics of people they do not know. Studies show that people are generally able to predict how another person will behave toward them based on initial interactions. People's accuracy and ability to predict interaction based on first impressions vary, but people with high accuracy are typically socially skilled and popular and have less loneliness, anxiety, and depression; more satisfying relationships; and more senior positions and higher salaries (Hargie, 2011). So not only do first impressions matter but having the ability to form accurate first impressions seems to correlate to many other positive characteristics.

First impressions are enduring because of the *primacy effect*, which leads us to place more value on the first information we receive about a person. So if we interpret the first information we receive from or about a person as positive, then a positive first impression will form and influence how we respond to that person as the interaction continues. Likewise, negative interpretations of information can lead us to form negative first impressions. If you sit down at a restaurant and servers walk by for several minutes and no one greets you, then you will likely interpret that negatively and not have a good impression of your server when he finally shows up. This may lead you to be short with the server, which may lead him to not be as attentive as he normally would. At this point, a series of negative interactions has set into motion a cycle that will be very difficult to reverse and make positive.

The *recency effect* leads us to put more weight on the most recent impression we have of a person's communication over earlier impressions. Even a positive first impression can be tarnished by a negative final impression. Imagine that a professor has maintained a relatively high level of credibility with you over the course of the semester. She made a good first impression by being organized, approachable, and interesting during the first days of class. The rest of the semester went fairly well with no major conflicts. However, during the last week of the term, she didn't have final papers graded and ready to turn back by the time she said she would, which left you with some uncertainty about how well you needed to do on the final exam to earn an A in the class. When you did get your paper back, on the last day of class, you saw that your grade was much lower than you expected. If this happened to you, what would you write on the instructor evaluation? Because of the recency effect, many students would likely give a disproportionate amount of value to the professor's actions in the final week of the semester, negatively skewing the evaluation, which is supposed to be reflective of the entire semester. Even though the professor only returned one assignment late, that fact is very recent in students' minds and can overshadow the positive impression that formed many weeks earlier.

Physical and Environmental Influences on Perception

We make first impressions based on a variety of factors, including physical and environmental characteristics. In terms of physical characteristics, style of dress and grooming are important, especially in professional contexts. We have a general schemata regarding how to dress and groom for various situations ranging from formal, to business casual, to casual, to lounging around the house.

You would likely be able to offer some descriptors of how a person would look and act from the following categories: a goth person, a prep, a jock, a fashionista, a hipster. The schemata associated with these various cliques or styles is formed through personal experience and through exposure to media representations of these groups. Different professions also have schemata for appearance and dress. Imagine a doctor, mechanic, congressperson, exotic dancer, or mail carrier. Each group has clothing and personal styles that create and fit into general patterns. Of course, the mental picture we have of any of the examples above is not going to be representative of the whole group, meaning that stereotypical thinking often exists within our schema. We will learn more about the negative effects of stereotypical thinking later in the chapter, but it's important to understand how persuasive various physical perceptual influences can be.

Think about the harm that has been done when people pose as police or doctors to commit crimes or other acts of malice. Seeing someone in a white lab coat automatically leads us to see that person as an authority figure, and we fall into a scripted pattern of deferring to the "doctor" and not asking too many questions. The Milgram experiments offer a startling example of how powerful these influences are. In the experiments, participants followed instructions from a man in a white lab coat (who was actually an actor), who prompted them to deliver electric shocks to a person in another room every time the other person answered a memory question incorrectly. The experiment was actually about how people defer to authority figures instead of acting independently. Although no one was actually being shocked in the other room, many participants continued to "shock," at very high levels of voltage, the other person even after that person supposedly being shocked complained of chest pains and became unresponsive (Encina, 2003).

Clothing, like a doctor's lab coat, forms powerful impressions that have noticeable effects on people's behavior.

Lisa Brewster – [Happy doctor]() – CC BY-SA 2.0.

Finally, the material objects and people that surround a person influence our perception. In the MTV show *Room Raiders*, contestants go into the bedrooms of three potential dates and choose the one they want to go on the date with based on the impressions made while examining each potential date's cleanliness, decorations, clothes, trophies and awards, books, music, and so on. Research supports the reliability of such impressions, as people have been shown to make reasonably accurate judgments about a person's personality after viewing his or her office or bedroom (Hargie, 2011). Although the artificial scenario set up in *Room Raiders* doesn't exactly match up with typical encounters, the link between environmental cues and perception is important enough for many companies to create policies about what can and can't be displayed in personal office spaces. It would seem odd for a bank manager to have an *Animal House* poster hanging in his office, and that would definitely influence customers' perceptions of the manager's personality and credibility. The arrangement of furniture also creates impressions. Walking into a meeting and sitting on one end of a long boardroom table is typically less inviting than sitting at a round table or on a sofa.

Although some physical and environmental features are easier to change than others, it is useful to become aware of how these factors, which aren't necessarily related to personality or verbal and nonverbal communication, shape our perceptions. These early impressions also affect how we interpret and perceive later encounters, which can be further explained through the halo and horn effects.

The Halo and Horn Effects

We have a tendency to adapt information that conflicts with our earlier impressions in order to make it fit within the frame we have established. This is known as selective distortion, and it manifests in the halo and horn effects. The angelic halo and devilish horn are useful metaphors for the lasting effects of positive and negative impressions.

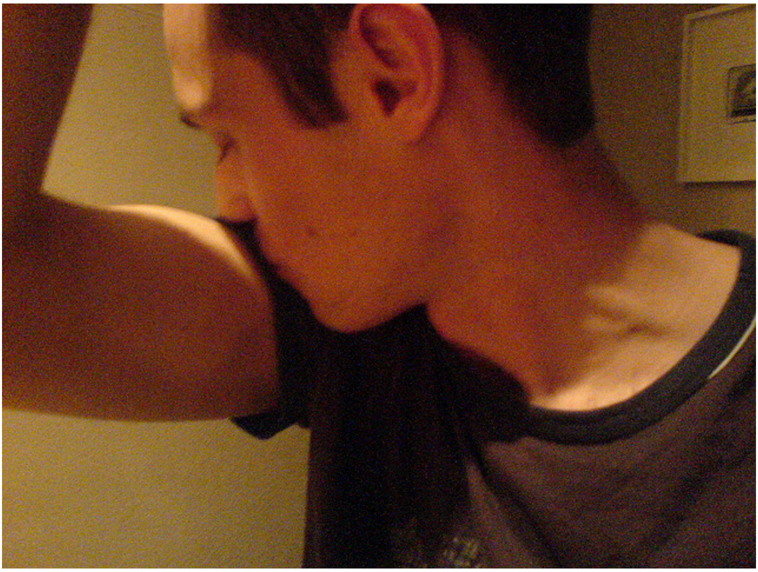
The **halo effect** occurs when initial positive perceptions lead us to view later interactions as positive. The **horn effect** occurs when initial negative perceptions lead us to view later interactions as negative (Hargie, 2011). Since impressions are especially important when a person is navigating the job market, let's imagine how the horn and halo effects could play out for a recent college graduate looking to land her first real job. Nell has recently graduated with her degree in communication studies and is looking to start her career as a corporate trainer. If one of Nell's professors has a relationship with an executive at an area business, his positive verbal recommendation will likely result in a halo effect for Nell. Since the executive thinks highly of his friend the professor, and the professor thinks highly of Nell, then the executive will start his interaction with Nell with a positive impression and interpret her behaviors more positively than he would otherwise. The halo effect initiated by the professor's recommendation may even lead the executive to dismiss or overlook some negative behaviors. Let's say Nell doesn't have a third party to help make a connection and arrives late for her interview. That negative impression may create a horn effect that carries through the interview. Even if Nell presents as competent and friendly, the negative first impression could lead the executive to minimize or ignore those positive characteristics, and the company may not hire her.

Culture, Personality, and Perception

Our cultural identities and our personalities affect our perceptions. Sometimes we are conscious of the effects and sometimes we are not. In either case, we have a tendency to favor others who exhibit cultural or personality traits that match up with our own. This tendency is so strong that is often leads us to assume that people we like are more similar to us than they actually are. Knowing more about how these forces influence our perceptions can help us become more aware of and competent in regards to the impressions we form of others.

Culture

Race, gender, sexual orientation, class, ability, nationality, and age all affect the perceptions that we make. The schema through which we interpret what we perceive is influenced by our cultural identities. As we are socialized into various cultural identities, we internalize beliefs, attitudes, and values shared by others in our cultural group. Schemata held by members of a cultural identity group have similarities, but schemata held by different cultural groups may vary greatly. Unless we are exposed to various cultural groups and learn how others perceive us and the world around them, we will likely have a narrow or naïve view of the world and assume that others see things the way we do. Exposing yourself to and experiencing cultural differences in perspective doesn't mean that you have to change your schemata to match another cultural group's. Instead, it may offer you a chance to better understand why and how your schemata were constructed the way they were.



How we interpret basic sensory information, like smells, varies by culture. In some cultures, natural body odor isn't considered an offensive smell like it generally is in the United States.

As we have learned, perception starts with information that comes in through our senses. How we perceive even basic sensory information is influenced by our culture, as is illustrated in the following list:

- **Sight.** People in different cultures "read" art in different ways, differing in terms of where they start to look at an image and the types of information they perceive and process.
- **Sound.** "Atonal" music in some Asian cultures is unpleasing; it is uncomfortable to people who aren't taught that these combinations of sounds are pleasing.
- **Touch.** In some cultures, it would be very offensive for a man

to touch—even tap on the shoulder—a woman who isn't a relative.

- **Taste.** Tastes for foods vary greatly around the world. "Stinky tofu," which is a favorite snack of people in Taipei, Taiwan's famous night market, would likely be very off-putting in terms of taste and smell to many foreign tourists.
- **Smell.** While US Americans spend considerable effort to mask natural body odor, which we typically find unpleasant, with soaps, sprays, and lotions, some other cultures would not find it unpleasant or even notice what we consider "b.o." Those same cultures may find a US American's "clean" (soapy, perfumed, deodorized) smell unpleasant.

Aside from differences in reactions to basic information we take in through our senses, there is also cultural variation in how we perceive more complicated constructs, like marriage, politics, and privacy. In May of 2012, French citizens elected a new president. François Hollande moved into the presidential palace with his partner of five years, Valerie Trierweiler. They are the first unmarried couple in the country's history to occupy the presidential palace (de la Baume, 2012). Even though new census statistics show that more unmarried couples are living together than ever before in the United States, many still disapprove of the practice, and it is hard to imagine a US president in a similar circumstance as France's Hollande. Other places like Saudi Arabia and the Vatican have strong cultural aversions to such a practice, which could present problems when France's first couple travels abroad.

As we've already learned, our brain processes information by putting it into categories and looking for predictability and patterns. The previous examples have covered how we do this with sensory information and with more abstract concepts like marriage and politics, but we also do this with people. When we categorize people, we generally view them as "like us" or "not like us." This simple us/them split affects subsequent interaction, including impressions and attributions. For example, we tend to view people we perceive to be like us as more trustworthy, friendly, and honest than people we perceive to be not like us (Brewer, 1999). We are also more likely to use internal attribution to explain the negative behavior of people we perceive to be different from us. If a person of a different race cuts another driver off in traffic, the driver is even more likely to attribute that action to the other driver's internal qualities (thinking, for example, "He or she is inconsiderate and reckless!") than they would someone of their own race. Having such inflexible categories can have negative consequences, and later we will discuss how forcing people into rigid categories leads to stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. Of course, race isn't the only marker of difference that influences our perceptions, and the problem with our rough categorization of people into "like us" and "not like us" categories is that these differences aren't really as easy to perceive as we think. We cannot always tell whether or not someone is culturally like us through visual cues. For some cultural identities, like sexual orientation and ability, our awareness of any differences may only come when the other person discloses their identity to us.

Although gender stereotypes are perpetuated in the media and internalized by many people, men and women actually communicate much more similarly than differently.

You no doubt frequently hear people talking and writing about the “vast differences” between men and women. Whether it’s communication, athletic ability, expressing emotions, or perception, people will line up to say that women are one way and men are the other way. While it is true that gender affects our perception, the reason for this difference stems more from social norms than genetic, physical, or psychological differences between men and women. We are socialized to perceive differences between men and women, which leads us to exaggerate and amplify what differences there actually are (McCornack, 2007). We basically see the stereotypes and differences we are told to see, which helps to create a reality in which gender differences are “obvious.” However, numerous research studies have found that, especially in relation to multiple aspects of communication, men and women communicate much more similarly than differently. In summary, various cultural identities shape how we perceive others because beliefs, attitudes, and values of the cultural groups to which we belong are incorporated into our schemata.

Personality

I occasionally have potential employers of students I have taught or supervised call me to do “employment verifications” during which they ask general questions about the applicant. While they may ask a few questions about intellectual ability or academic performance, they typically ask questions that try to create a personality profile of the applicant. They basically want to know what kind of leader, coworker, and person he or she is. This is a smart move on their part because our personalities greatly influence how we see ourselves in the world and how we perceive and interact with others.

Personality refers to a person's general way of thinking, feeling, and behaving based on underlying motivations and impulses (McCornack, 2007). These underlying motivations and impulses form our personality traits. Personality traits are "underlying," but they are fairly enduring once a person reaches adulthood. That is not to say that people's personalities do not change, but major changes in personality are not common unless they result from some form of trauma. Although personality scholars believe there are thousands of personalities, they all comprise some combination of the same few traits. Much research has been done on personality traits, and the "Big Five" that are most commonly discussed are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness (McCrea, 2001). These five traits appear to be representative of personalities across cultures, and you can read more about what each of these traits entails below. If you are interested in how you rank in terms of personality traits, there are many online tests you can take. A Big Five test can be taken at the following website: http://www.outofservice.com/bigfive.

The Big Five Personality Traits

- **Extraversion.** Refers to a person's interest in interacting with others. People with high extraversion are sociable and often called "extroverts." People with low extraversion are less sociable and are often called "introverts."
- **Agreeableness.** Refers to a person's level of trustworthiness and friendliness. People with high agreeableness are cooperative and likable. People with low agreeableness are suspicious of others and sometimes aggressive, which makes it more difficult for people to find them pleasant to be around.
- **Conscientiousness.** Refers to a person's level of self-organization and motivation. People with high conscientiousness are methodical, motivated, and dependable. People with low conscientiousness are less focused, less

careful, and less dependable.

- **Neuroticism.** Refers to a person's level of negative thoughts regarding himself or herself. People high in neuroticism are insecure and experience emotional distress and may be perceived as unstable. People low in neuroticism are more relaxed, have fewer emotional swings, and are perceived as more stable.
- **Openness.** Refers to a person's willingness to consider new ideas and perspectives. People high in openness are creative and are perceived as open minded. People low in openness are more rigid and set in their thinking and are perceived as "set in their ways."

Scholarship related to personality serves many purposes, and some of them tie directly to perception. Corporations and television studios spend millions of dollars on developing personality profiles and personality testing. Corporations can make hiring and promotion decisions based on personality test results, which can save them money and time if they can weed out those who don't "fit" the position before they get in the door and drain resources. Television studios make casting decisions based on personality profiles because they know that certain personalities evoke strong and specific reactions from viewers. The reality television show *Survivor* has done more than one season where they bring back "Heroes and Villains," which already indicates that the returning cast members made strong impressions on the show's producers and audience members. Think about the reality television stars that you love to root for, want to see lose, and can't stand to look at or look away from. Shows like *Celebrity Rehab* intentionally cast fading stars who already have strong personalities and emotional and addiction issues in order to create the kind of human train wrecks that attract millions of viewers. So why does this work?

It is likely that you have more in common with that reality TV star than you care to admit. We tend to focus on personality traits in others that we feel are important to our own personality. What we like in ourselves, we like in others, and what we dislike in ourselves, we dislike in others (McCornack, 2007). If you admire a person's loyalty, then loyalty is probably a trait that you think you possess as well. If you work hard to be positive and motivated and suppress negative and unproductive urges within yourself, you will likely think harshly about those negative traits in someone else. After all, if you can suppress your negativity, why can't they do the same? This way of thinking isn't always accurate or logical, but it is common.

The concept of *assumed similarity* refers to our tendency to perceive others as similar to us. When we don't have enough information about a person to know their key personality traits, we fill in the gaps—usually assuming they possess traits similar to those we see in ourselves. We also tend to assume that people have similar attitudes, or likes and dislikes, as us. If you set your friend up with someone you think they will really like only to find out there was no chemistry when they met, you may be surprised to realize your friend doesn't have the same tastes as you. Even though we may assume more trait and taste similarity between our significant others and ourselves than there actually is, research generally finds that while people do interpersonally group based on many characteristics including race, class, and intelligence, the findings don't show that people with similar personalities group together (Beer & Watson, 2008).

In summary, personality affects our perception, and we all tend to be amateur personality scholars given the amount of effort we put into assuming and evaluating others' personality traits. This bank of knowledge we accumulate based on previous interactions with people is used to help us predict how interactions will unfold and help us manage our interpersonal relationships. When we size up a person based on their personality, we are auditioning or interviewing them in a way to see if we think there is compatibility. We use these implicit personality theories to generalize a person's overall personality from the traits we can perceive. The theories are "implicit" because they are not of academic but of experience-based origin, and the information we use to theorize about people's personalities isn't explicitly known or observed but implied. In other words, we use previous experience to guess other people's personality traits. We then assume more about a person based on the personality traits we assign to them.

This process of assuming has its advantages and drawbacks. In terms of advantages, the use of *implicit personality theories* offers us a perceptual shortcut that can be useful when we first meet someone. Our assessment of their traits and subsequent assumptions about who they are as a person makes us feel like we "know the person," which reduces uncertainty and facilitates further interaction. In terms of drawbacks, our experience-based assumptions aren't always correct, but they are still persuasive and enduring. As we have already learned, first impressions carry a lot of weight in terms of how they influence further interaction. Positive and negative impressions formed early can also lead to a halo effect or a horn effect, which we discussed earlier. Personality-based impressions can also connect to impressions based on physical and environmental cues to make them even stronger. For example, perceiving another person as attractive can create a halo effect that then leads you to look for behavioral cues that you can then tie to positive personality traits. You may notice that the attractive person also says "please" and "thank you," which increases his or her likeability. You may notice that the person has clean and fashionable shoes, which leads you to believe he or she is professional and competent but also trendy and hip. Now you have an overall positive impression of this person that will affect your subsequent behaviors (Beer & Watson, 2008). But how accurate were your impressions? If on your way home you realize you just bought a car from this person, who happened to be a car salesperson, that was $7,000 over your price range, you might have second thoughts about how good a person he or she actually is.

Key Takeaways

- We use attributions to interpret perceptual information, specifically, people's behavior. Internal attributions connect behavior to internal characteristics such as personality traits. External attributions connect behavior to external characteristics such as situational factors.
- Two common perceptual errors that occur in the process of attribution are the fundamental attribution error and the self-serving bias.
    - The fundamental attribution error refers to our tendency to overattribute other people's behaviors to internal rather than external causes.
    - The self-serving bias refers to our tendency to overattribute our successes to internal factors and overattribute our failures to external factors.
- First and last impressions are powerful forces in the perception process. The primacy effect is a perceptual tendency to place more importance on initial impressions than later impressions. The recency effect is the perceptual tendency to place more importance on the most recent impressions over earlier impressions.
- Physical and environmental cues such as clothing, grooming, attractiveness, and material objects influence the impressions that we form of people.

- The halo effect describes a perceptual effect that occurs when initial positive impressions lead us to view later interactions as positive. The horn effect describes a perceptual effect that occurs when initial negative impressions lead us to view later interactions as negative.
- Cultural identities such as race, gender, sexual orientation, class, ability, nationality, and age all affect the perceptions that we make about basic sensory information such as sounds and smells as well as larger concepts such as marriage and privacy. Despite the fact that much popular knowledge claims that women and men communicate very differently, communication processes for each gender are more similar than different.
- Personality affects perception in many ways. Our personality traits, which are our underlying and enduring motivations for thinking and behaving the way we do, affect how we see others and ourselves. We use observed and implied personality traits to form impressions of others, which then influence how we act toward them.

Exercises

1. Think of a recent conflict and how you explained the behavior that caused the conflict and subsequently formed impressions about the other

person based on your perceptions. Briefly describe the conflict situation and then identify internal and external attributions for your behavior and the behavior of the other person. Is there any evidence of the fundamental attribution error or self-serving bias in this conflict encounter? If so, what?

2. Describe a situation in which you believe the primacy and/or recency effect influenced your perceptions of a person or event.
3. Has your perception of something ever changed because of exposure to cultural difference? For example, have you grown to like a kind of food, music, clothing, or other custom that you earlier perceived unfavorably?

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2.3 Perceiving and Presenting Self

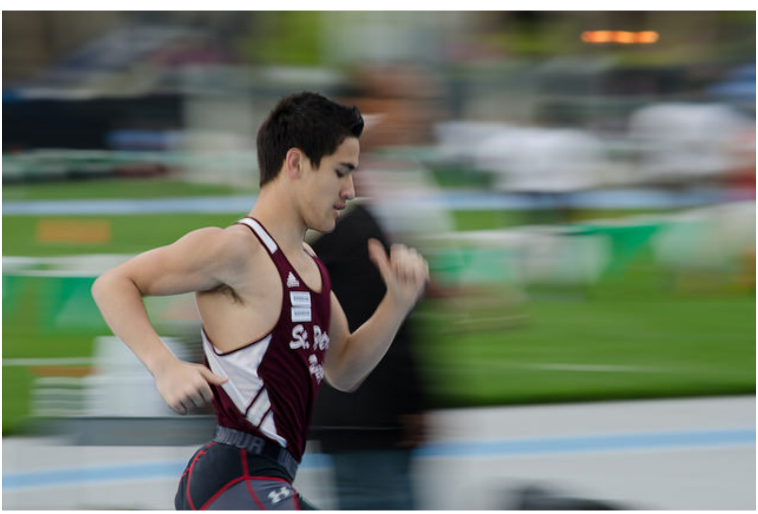
Learning Objectives

1. Define self-concept and discuss how we develop our self-concept.
2. Define self-esteem and discuss how we develop self-esteem.
3. Explain how social comparison theory and self-discrepancy theory influence self-perception.
4. Discuss how social norms, family, culture, and media influence self-perception.
5. Define self-presentation and discuss common self-presentation strategies.

Just as our perception of others affects how we communicate, so does our perception of ourselves. But what influences our self-perception? How much of our self is a product of our own making and how much of it is constructed based on how others react to us? How do we present ourselves to others in ways that maintain our sense of self or challenge how others see us? We will begin to answer these questions in this section as we explore self-concept, self-esteem, and self-presentation.

Self-Concept

Self-concept refers to the overall idea of who a person thinks he or she is. If I said, "Tell me who you are," your answers would be clues as to how you see yourself, your self-concept. Each person has an overall self-concept that might be encapsulated in a short list of overarching characteristics that he or she finds important. But each person's self-concept is also influenced by context, meaning we think differently about ourselves depending on the situation we are in. In some situations, personal characteristics, such as our abilities, personality, and other distinguishing features, will best describe who we are. You might consider yourself laid back, traditional, funny, open minded, or driven, or you might label yourself a leader or a thrill seeker. In other situations, our self-concept may be tied to group or cultural membership. For example, you might consider yourself a member of the Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity, a Southerner, or a member of the track team.



Men are more likely than women to include group memberships in their self-concept descriptions.

Stefano Ravalli – In control – CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Our self-concept is also formed through our interactions with others and their reactions to us. The concept of the looking glass self explains that we see ourselves reflected in other people's reactions to us and then form our self-concept based on how we believe other people see us (Cooley, 1902). This reflective process of building our self-concept is based on what other people have actually said, such as "You're a good listener," and other people's actions, such as coming to you for advice. These thoughts evoke emotional responses that feed into our self-concept. For example, you may think, "I'm glad that people can count on me to listen to their problems."

We also develop our self-concept through comparisons to other people. Social comparison theory states that we describe and evaluate ourselves in terms of how we compare to other people. Social comparisons are based on two dimensions: superiority/inferiority and similarity/difference (Hargie, 2011). In terms of superiority and inferiority, we evaluate characteristics like attractiveness, intelligence, athletic ability, and so on. For example, you may judge yourself to be more intelligent than your brother or less athletic than your best friend, and these judgments are incorporated into your self-concept. This process of comparison and evaluation isn't necessarily a bad thing, but it can have negative consequences if our reference group isn't appropriate. Reference groups are the groups we use for social comparison, and they typically change based on what we are evaluating. In terms of athletic ability, many people choose unreasonable reference groups with which to engage in social comparison. If a man wants to get into better shape and starts an exercise routine, he may be discouraged by his difficulty keeping up with the aerobics instructor or running partner and judge himself as inferior, which could negatively affect his self-concept. Using as a reference group people who have only recently started a fitness program but have shown progress could help maintain a more accurate and hopefully positive self-concept.

We also engage in social comparison based on similarity and difference. Since self-concept is context specific, similarity may be desirable in some situations and difference more desirable in others. Factors like age and personality may influence whether or not we want to fit in or stand out. Although we compare ourselves to others throughout our lives, adolescent and teen years usually bring new pressure to be similar to or different from particular reference groups. Think of all the cliques in high school and how people voluntarily and involuntarily broke off into groups based on popularity, interest, culture, or grade level. Some kids in your high school probably wanted to fit in with and be similar to other people in the marching band but be different from the football players. Conversely, athletes were probably more apt to compare themselves, in terms of similar athletic ability, to other athletes rather than kids in show choir. But social comparison can be complicated by perceptual influences. As we learned earlier, we organize information based on similarity and difference, but these patterns don't always hold true. Even though students involved in athletics and students involved in arts may seem very different, a dancer or singer may also be very athletic, perhaps even more so than a member of the football team. As with other aspects of perception, there are positive and negative consequences of social comparison.

We generally want to know where we fall in terms of ability and performance as compared to others, but what people do with this information and how it affects self-concept varies. Not all people feel they need to be at the top of the list, but some won't stop until they get the high score on the video game or set a new school record in a track-and-field event. Some people strive to be first chair in the clarinet section of the orchestra, while another person may be content to be second chair. The education system promotes social comparison through grades and rewards such as honor rolls and dean's lists. Although education and privacy laws prevent me from displaying each student's grade on a test or paper for the whole class to see, I do typically report the aggregate grades, meaning the total number of As, Bs, Cs, and so on. This doesn't violate anyone's privacy rights, but it allows students to see where they fell in the distribution. This type of social comparison can be used as motivation. The student who was one of only three out of twenty-three to get a D on the exam knows that most of her classmates are performing better than she is, which may lead her to think, "If they can do it, I can do it." But social comparison that isn't reasoned can have negative effects and result in negative thoughts like "Look at how bad I did. Man, I'm stupid!" These negative thoughts can lead to negative behaviors, because we try to maintain internal consistency, meaning we act in ways that match up with our self-concept. So if the student begins to question her academic abilities and then incorporates an assessment of herself as a "bad student" into her self-concept, she may then behave in ways consistent with that, which is only going to worsen her academic performance. Additionally, a student might be comforted to learn that he isn't the only person who got a D and then not feel the need to try to improve, since he has company. You can see in this example that evaluations we place on our self-concept can lead to cycles of thinking and acting. These cycles relate to self-esteem and self-efficacy, which are components of our self-concept.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem refers to the judgments and evaluations we make about our self-concept. While self-concept is a broad description of the self, self-esteem is a more specifically an evaluation of the self (Byrne, 1996). If I again prompted you to "Tell me who you are," and then asked you to evaluate (label as good/bad, positive/negative, desirable/undesirable) each of the things you listed about yourself, I would get clues about your self-esteem. Like self-concept, self-esteem has general and specific elements. Generally, some people are more likely to evaluate themselves positively while others are more likely to evaluate themselves negatively (Brockner, 1988). More specifically, our self-esteem varies across our life span and across contexts.

Self-esteem varies throughout our lives, but some people generally think more positively of themselves and some people think more negatively.

How we judge ourselves affects our communication and our behaviors, but not every negative or positive judgment carries the same weight. The negative evaluation of a trait that isn't very important for our self-concept will likely not result in a loss of self-esteem. For example, I am not very good at drawing. While I appreciate drawing as an art form, I don't consider drawing ability to be a very big part of my self-concept. If someone critiqued my drawing ability, my self-esteem wouldn't take a big hit. I do consider myself a good teacher, however, and I have spent and continue to spend considerable time and effort on improving my knowledge of teaching and my teaching skills. If someone critiqued my teaching knowledge and/or abilities, my self-esteem would definitely be hurt. This doesn't mean that we can't be evaluated on something we find important. Even though teaching is very important to my self-concept, I am regularly evaluated on it. Every semester, I am evaluated by my students, and every year, I am evaluated by my dean, department chair, and colleagues. Most of that feedback is in the form of constructive criticism, which can still be difficult to receive, but when taken in the spirit of self-improvement, it is valuable and may even enhance our self-concept and self-esteem. In fact, in professional contexts, people with higher self-esteem are more likely to work harder based on negative feedback, are less negatively affected by work stress, are able to handle workplace conflict better, and are better able to work independently and solve problems (Brockner, 1988). Self-esteem isn't the only factor that contributes to our self-concept; perceptions about our competence also play a role in developing our sense of self.

Self-Efficacy refers to the judgments people make about their ability to perform a task within a specific context (Bandura, 1997). As you can see in Figure 2.2 "Relationship between Self-Efficacy, Self-Esteem, and Self-Concept", judgments about our self-efficacy influence our self-esteem, which influences our self-concept. The following example also illustrates these interconnections.

Figure 2.2 Relationship between Self-Efficacy, Self-Esteem, and Self-Concept

Pedro did a good job on his first college speech. During a meeting with his professor, Pedro indicates that he is confident going into the next speech and thinks he will do well. This skill-based assessment is an indication that Pedro has a high level of self-efficacy related to public speaking. If he does well on the speech, the praise from his classmates and professor will reinforce his self-efficacy and lead him to positively evaluate his speaking skills, which will contribute to his self-esteem. By the end of the class, Pedro likely thinks of himself as a good public speaker, which may then become an important part of his self-concept. Throughout these points of connection, it's important to remember that self-perception affects how we communicate, behave, and perceive other things. Pedro's increased feeling of self-efficacy may give him more confidence in his delivery, which will likely result in positive feedback that reinforces his self-perception. He may start to perceive his professor more positively since they share an interest in public speaking, and he may begin to notice other people's speaking skills more during class presentations and public lectures. Over time, he may even start to think about changing his major to communication or pursuing career options that incorporate public speaking, which would further integrate being "a good public speaker" into his self-concept. You can hopefully see that these interconnections can create powerful positive or negative cycles. While some of this process is under our control, much of it is also shaped by the people in our lives.

The verbal and nonverbal feedback we get from people affect our feelings of self-efficacy and our self-esteem. As we saw in Pedro's example, being given positive feedback can increase our self-efficacy, which may make us more likely to engage in a similar task in the future (Hargie, 2011). Obviously, negative feedback can lead to decreased self-efficacy and a declining interest in engaging with the activity again. In general, people adjust their expectations about their abilities based on feedback they get from others. Positive feedback tends to make people raise their expectations for themselves and negative feedback does the opposite, which ultimately affects behaviors and creates the cycle. When feedback from others is different from how we view ourselves, additional cycles may develop that impact self-esteem and self-concept.

Self-discrepancy theory states that people have beliefs about and expectations for their actual and potential selves that do not always match up with what they actually experience (Higgins, 1987). To understand this theory, we have to understand the different "selves" that make up our self-concept, which are the actual, ideal, and ought selves. The actual self consists of the attributes that you or someone else believes you *actually* possess. The ideal self consists of the attributes that you or someone else *would like you* to possess. The ought self consists of the attributes you or someone else believes you *should* possess.

These different selves can conflict with each other in various combinations. Discrepancies between the actual and ideal/ought selves can be motivating in some ways and prompt people to act for self-improvement. For example, if your ought self should volunteer more for the local animal shelter, then your actual self may be more inclined to do so. Discrepancies between the ideal and ought selves can be especially stressful. For example, many professional women who are also mothers have an ideal view of self that includes professional success and advancement. They may also have an ought self that includes a sense of duty and obligation to be a full-time mother. The actual self may be someone who does OK at both but doesn't quite live up to the expectations of either. These discrepancies do not just create cognitive unease—they also lead to emotional, behavioral, and communicative changes.

People who feel that it's their duty to recycle but do not actually do it will likely experience a discrepancy between their actual and ought selves.

When we compare the actual self to the expectations of ourselves and others, we can see particular patterns of emotional and behavioral effects. When our actual self doesn't match up with our own ideals of self, we are not obtaining our own desires and hopes, which can lead to feelings of dejection including disappointment, dissatisfaction, and frustration. For example, if your ideal self has no credit card debt and your actual self does, you may be frustrated with your lack of financial discipline and be motivated to stick to your budget and pay off your credit card bills.

When our actual self doesn't match up with other people's ideals for us, we may not be obtaining significant others' desires and hopes, which can lead to feelings of dejection including shame, embarrassment, and concern for losing the affection or approval of others. For example, if a significant other sees you as an "A" student and you get a 2.8 GPA your first year of college, then you may be embarrassed to share your grades with that person.

When our actual self doesn't match up with what we think other people think we should obtain, we are not living up to the ought self that we think others have constructed for us, which can lead to feelings of agitation, feeling threatened, and fearing potential punishment. For example, if your parents think you should follow in their footsteps and take over the family business, but your actual self wants to go into the military, then you may be unsure of what to do and fear being isolated from the family.

Finally, when our actual self doesn't match up with what we think we should obtain, we are not meeting what we see as our duties or obligations, which can lead to feelings of agitation including guilt, weakness, and a feeling that we have fallen short of our moral standard (Higgins, 1987). For example, if your ought self should volunteer more for the local animal shelter, then your actual self may be more inclined to do so due to the guilt of reading about the increasing number of animals being housed at the facility. The following is a review of the four potential discrepancies between selves:

- **Actual vs. own ideals.** We have an overall feeling that we are not obtaining our desires and hopes, which leads to feelings of disappointment, dissatisfaction, and frustration.
- **Actual vs. others' ideals.** We have an overall feeling that we are not obtaining significant others' desires and hopes for us, which leads to feelings of shame and embarrassment.
- **Actual vs. others' ought.** We have an overall feeling that we are not meeting what others see as our duties and obligations, which leads to feelings of agitation including fear of potential punishment.
- **Actual vs. own ought.** We have an overall feeling that we are not meeting our duties and obligations, which can lead to a feeling that we have fallen short of our own moral standards.

Influences on Self-Perception

We have already learned that other people influence our self-concept and self-esteem. While interactions we have with individuals and groups are definitely important to consider, we must also note the influence that larger, more systemic forces have on our self-perception. Social and family influences, culture, and the media all play a role in shaping who we think we are and how we feel about ourselves. Although these are powerful socializing forces, there are ways to maintain some control over our self-perception.

Social and Family Influences

Various forces help socialize us into our respective social and cultural groups and play a powerful role in presenting us with options about who we can be. While we may like to think that our self-perception starts with a blank canvas, our perceptions are limited by our experiences and various social and cultural contexts.

Parents and peers shape our self-perceptions in positive and negative ways. Feedback that we get from significant others, which includes close family, can lead to positive views of self (Hargie, 2011). In the past few years, however, there has been a public discussion and debate about how much positive reinforcement people should give to others, especially children. The following questions have been raised: Do we have current and upcoming generations that have been overpraised? Is the praise given warranted? What are the positive and negative effects of praise? What is the end goal of the praise? Let's briefly look at this discussion and its connection to self-perception.


JUNGLENASTICS
2009

Some experts have warned that overpraising children can lead to distorted self-concepts.

Whether praise is warranted or not is very subjective and specific to each person and context, but in general there have been questions raised about the potential negative effects of too much praise. Motivation is the underlying force that drives us to do things. Sometimes we are intrinsically motivated, meaning we want to do something for the love of doing it or the resulting internal satisfaction. Other times we are extrinsically motivated, meaning we do something to receive a reward or avoid punishment. If you put effort into completing a short documentary for a class because you love filmmaking and editing, you have been largely motivated by intrinsic forces. If you complete the documentary because you want an "A" and know that if you fail your parents will not give you money for your spring break trip, then you are motivated by extrinsic factors. Both can, of course, effectively motivate us. Praise is a form of extrinsic reward, and if there is an actual reward associated with the praise, like money or special recognition, some people speculate that intrinsic motivation will suffer. But what's so good about intrinsic motivation? Intrinsic motivation is more substantial and long-lasting than extrinsic motivation and can lead to the development of a work ethic and sense of pride in one's abilities. Intrinsic motivation can move people to accomplish great things over long periods of time and be happy despite the effort and sacrifices made. Extrinsic motivation dies when the reward stops. Additionally, too much praise can lead people to have a misguided sense of their abilities. College professors who are reluctant to fail students who produce failing work may be setting those students up to be shocked when their supervisor critiques their abilities or output once they get into a professional context (Hargie, 2011).

There are cultural differences in the amount of praise and positive feedback that teachers and parents give their children. For example, teachers give less positive reinforcement in Japanese and Taiwanese classrooms than do teachers in US classrooms. Chinese and Kenyan parents do not regularly praise their children because they fear it may make them too individualistic, rude, or arrogant (Wierzbicka, 2004). So the phenomenon of overpraising isn't universal, and the debate over its potential effects is not resolved.

Research has also found that communication patterns develop between parents and children that are common to many verbally and physically abusive relationships. Such patterns have negative effects on a child's self-efficacy and self-esteem (Morgan & Wilson, 2007). As you'll recall from our earlier discussion, attributions are links we make to identify the cause of a behavior. In the case of aggressive or abusive parents, they are not as able to distinguish between mistakes and intentional behaviors, often seeing honest mistakes as intended and reacting negatively to the child. Such parents also communicate generally negative evaluations to their child by saying, for example, "You can't do anything right!" or "You're a bad girl." When children do exhibit positive behaviors, abusive parents are more likely to use external attributions that diminish the achievement of the child by saying, for example, "You only won because the other team was off their game." In general, abusive parents have unpredictable reactions to their children's positive and negative behavior, which creates an uncertain and often scary climate for a child that can lead to lower self-esteem and erratic or aggressive behavior. The cycles of praise and blame are just two examples of how the family as a socializing force can influence our self-perceptions. Culture also influences how we see ourselves.

Culture

How people perceive themselves varies across cultures. For example, many cultures exhibit a phenomenon known as the self-enhancement bias, meaning that we tend to emphasize our desirable qualities relative to other people (Loughnan et al., 2011). But the degree to which people engage in self-enhancement varies. A review of many studies in this area found that people in Western countries such as the United States were significantly more likely to self-enhance than people in countries such as Japan. Many scholars explain this variation using a common measure of cultural variation that claims people in individualistic cultures are more likely to engage in competition and openly praise accomplishments than people in collectivistic cultures. The difference in self-enhancement has also been tied to economics, with scholars arguing that people in countries with greater income inequality are more likely to view themselves as superior to others or want to be perceived as superior to others (even if they don't have economic wealth) in order to conform to the country's values and norms. This holds true because countries with high levels of economic inequality, like the United States, typically value competition and the right to boast about winning or succeeding, while countries with more economic equality, like Japan, have a cultural norm of modesty (Loughnan, 2011).

Race also plays a role in self-perception. For example, positive self-esteem and self-efficacy tend to be higher in African American adolescent girls than Caucasian girls (Stockton et al., 2009). In fact, more recent studies have discounted much of the early research on race and self-esteem that purported that African Americans of all ages have lower self-esteem than whites. Self-perception becomes more complex when we consider biracial individuals—more specifically those born to couples comprising an African American and a white parent (Bowles, 1993). In such cases, it is challenging for biracial individuals to embrace both of their heritages, and social comparison becomes more difficult due to diverse and sometimes conflicting reference groups. Since many biracial individuals identify as and are considered African American by society, living and working within a black community can help foster more positive self-perceptions in these biracial individuals. Such a community offers a more nurturing environment and a buffer zone from racist attitudes but simultaneously distances biracial individuals from their white identity. Conversely, immersion into a predominantly white community and separation from a black community can lead biracial individuals to internalize negative views of people of color and perhaps develop a sense of inferiority. Gender intersects with culture and biracial identity to create different experiences and challenges for biracial men and women. Biracial men have more difficulty accepting their potential occupational limits, especially if they have white fathers, and biracial women have difficulty accepting their black features, such as hair and facial features. All these challenges lead to a sense of being marginalized from both ethnic groups and interfere in the development of positive self-esteem and a stable self-concept.

Biracial individuals may have challenges with self-perception as they try to integrate both racial identities into their self-concept.

There are some general differences in terms of gender and self-perception that relate to self-concept, self-efficacy, and envisioning ideal selves. As with any cultural differences, these are generalizations that have been supported by research, but they do not represent all individuals within a group. Regarding self-concept, men are more likely to describe themselves in terms of their group membership, and women are more likely to include references to relationships in their self-descriptions. For example, a man may note that he is a Tarheel fan, a boat enthusiast, or a member of the Rotary Club, and a woman may note that she is a mother of two or a loyal friend.

Regarding self-efficacy, men tend to have higher perceptions of self-efficacy than women (Hargie, 2011). In terms of actual and ideal selves, men and women in a variety of countries both described their ideal self as more masculine (Best & Thomas, 2004). As was noted earlier, gender differences are interesting to study but are very often exaggerated beyond the actual variations. Socialization and internalization of societal norms for gender differences accounts for much more of our perceived differences than do innate or natural differences between genders. These gender norms may be explicitly stated—for example, a mother may say to her son, "Boys don't play with dolls"—or they may be more implicit, with girls being encouraged to pursue historically feminine professions like teaching or nursing without others actually stating the expectation.

Media

The representations we see in the media affect our self-perception. The vast majority of media images include idealized representations of attractiveness. Despite the fact that the images of people we see in glossy magazines and on movie screens are not typically what we see when we look at the people around us in a classroom, at work, or at the grocery store, many of us continue to hold ourselves to an unrealistic standard of beauty and attractiveness. Movies, magazines, and television shows are filled with beautiful people, and less attractive actors, when they are present in the media, are typically portrayed as the butt of jokes, villains, or only as background extras (Patzer, 2008). Aside from overall attractiveness, the media also offers narrow representations of acceptable body weight.

Researchers have found that only 12 percent of prime-time characters are overweight, which is dramatically less than the national statistics for obesity among the actual US population (Patzer, 2008). Further, an analysis of how weight is discussed on prime-time sitcoms found that heavier female characters were often the targets of negative comments and jokes that audience members responded to with laughter. Conversely, positive comments about women's bodies were related to their thinness. In short, the heavier the character, the more negative the comments, and the thinner the character, the more positive the comments. The same researchers analyzed sitcoms for content regarding male characters' weight and found that although comments regarding their weight were made, they were fewer in number and not as negative, ultimately supporting the notion that overweight male characters are more accepted in media than overweight female characters. Much more attention has been paid in recent years to the potential negative effects of such narrow media representations. The following "Getting Critical" box explores the role of media in the construction of body image.

In terms of self-concept, media representations offer us guidance on what is acceptable or unacceptable and valued or not valued in our society. Mediated messages, in general, reinforce cultural stereotypes related to race, gender, age, sexual orientation, ability, and class. People from historically marginalized groups must look much harder than those in the dominant groups to find positive representations of their identities in media. As a critical thinker, it is important to question media messages and to examine who is included and who is excluded.

Advertising in particular encourages people to engage in social comparison, regularly communicating to us that we are inferior because we lack a certain product or that we need to change some aspect of our life to keep up with and be similar to others. For example, for many years advertising targeted to women instilled in them a fear of having a dirty house, selling them products that promised to keep their house clean, make their family happy, and impress their friends and neighbors. Now messages tell us to fear becoming old or unattractive, selling products to keep our skin tight and clear, which will in turn make us happy and popular.

"Getting Critical"

Body Image and Self-Perception

Take a look at any magazine, television show, or movie and you will most likely see very beautiful people. When you look around you in your daily life, there are likely not as many glamorous and gorgeous people. Scholars and media critics have critiqued this discrepancy for decades because it has contributed to many social issues and public health issues ranging from body dysmorphic disorder, to eating disorders, to lowered self-esteem.

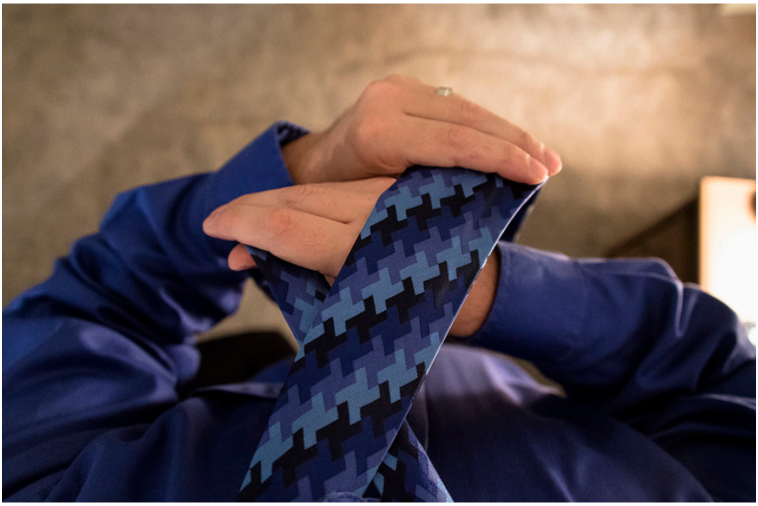
Much of the media is driven by advertising, and the business of media has been to perpetuate a "culture of lack" (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). This means that we are constantly told, via mediated images, that we lack something. In short, advertisements often tell us we don't have enough money, enough beauty, or enough material possessions. Over the past few decades, women's bodies in the media have gotten smaller and thinner, while men's bodies have gotten bigger and more muscular. At the same time, the US population has become dramatically more obese. As research shows that men and women are becoming more and more dissatisfied with their bodies, which ultimately affects their self-concept and self-esteem, health and beauty product lines proliferate and cosmetic surgeries and other types of enhancements become more and more popular. From young children to older adults, people are becoming more aware of and oftentimes unhappy with their bodies, which results in a variety of self-perception problems.

1. How do you think the media influences your self-perception and body image?
2. Describe the typical man that is portrayed in the media. Describe the typical woman that is portrayed in the media. What impressions do these typical bodies make on others? What are the potential positive and negative effects of the way the media portrays the human body?
3. Find an example of an "atypical" body represented in the media (a magazine, TV show, or movie). Is this person presented in a positive, negative, or neutral way? Why do you think this person was chosen?

Self-Presentation

How we perceive ourselves manifests in how we present ourselves to others. Self-presentation is the process of strategically concealing or revealing personal information in order to influence others' perceptions (Human et al., 2012). We engage in this process daily and for different reasons. Although people occasionally intentionally deceive others in the process of self-presentation, in general we try to make a good impression while still remaining authentic. Since self-presentation helps meet our instrumental, relational, and identity needs, we stand to lose quite a bit if we are caught intentionally misrepresenting ourselves. In May of 2012, Yahoo!'s CEO resigned after it became known that he stated on official documents that he had two college degrees when he actually only had one. In a similar incident, a woman who had long served as the dean of admissions for the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology was dismissed from her position after it was learned that she had only attended one year of college and had falsely indicated she had a bachelor's and master's degree (Webber & Korn, 2012). Such incidents clearly show that although people can get away with such false self-presentation for a while, the eventual consequences of being found out are dire. As communicators, we sometimes engage in more subtle forms of inauthentic self-presentation. For example, a person may state or imply that they know more about a subject or situation than they actually do in order to seem smart or "in the loop." During a speech, a speaker works on a polished and competent delivery to distract from a lack of substantive content. These cases of strategic self-presentation may not ever be found out, but communicators should still avoid them as they do not live up to the standards of ethical communication.

Consciously and competently engaging in self-presentation can have benefits because we can provide others with a more positive and accurate picture of who we are. People who are skilled at impression management are typically more engaging and confident, which allows others to pick up on more cues from which to form impressions (Human et al., 2012). Being a skilled self-presenter draws on many of the practices used by competent communicators, including becoming a higher self-monitor. When self-presentation skills and self-monitoring skills combine, communicators can simultaneously monitor their own expressions, the reaction of others, and the situational and social context (Sosik, Avolio, & Jung, 2002). Sometimes people get help with their self-presentation. Although most people can't afford or wouldn't think of hiring an image consultant, some people have started generously donating their self-presentation expertise to help others. Many people who have been riding the tough job market for a year or more get discouraged and may consider giving up on their job search.



People who have been out of work for a while may have difficulty finding the motivation to engage in the self-presentation behaviors needed to form favorable impressions.

There are two main types of self-presentation: prosocial and self-serving (Sosik, Avolio, & Jung, 2002). Prosocial self-presentation entails behaviors that present a person as a role model and make a person more likable and attractive. For example, a supervisor may call on her employees to uphold high standards for business ethics, model that behavior in her own actions, and compliment others when they exemplify those standards. Self-serving self-presentation entails behaviors that present a person as highly skilled, willing to challenge others, and someone not to be messed with. For example, a supervisor may publicly take credit for the accomplishments of others or publicly critique an employee who failed to meet a particular standard. In summary, prosocial strategies are aimed at benefiting others, while self-serving strategies benefit the self at the expense of others.

In general, we strive to present a public image that matches up with our self-concept, but we can also use self-presentation strategies to enhance our self-concept (Hargie, 2011). When we present ourselves in order to evoke a positive evaluative response, we are engaging in self-enhancement. In the pursuit of self-enhancement, a person might try to be as appealing as possible in a particular area or with a particular person to gain feedback that will enhance one's self-esteem. For example, a singer might train and practice for weeks before singing in front of a well-respected vocal coach but not invest as much effort in preparing to sing in front of friends. Although positive feedback from friends is beneficial, positive feedback from an experienced singer could enhance a person's self-concept. Self-enhancement can be productive and achieved competently, or it can be used inappropriately. Using self-enhancement behaviors just to gain the approval of others or out of self-centeredness may lead people to communicate in ways that are perceived as phony or overbearing and end up making an unfavorable impression (Sosik, Avolio, & Jung, 2002).

"Getting Plugged In"

Self-Presentation Online: Social Media, Digital Trails, and Your Reputation

Although social networking has long been a way to keep in touch with friends and colleagues, the advent of social media has made the process of making connections and those all-important first impressions much more complex. Just looking at Facebook as an example, we can clearly see that the very acts of constructing a profile, posting status updates, "liking" certain things, and sharing various information via Facebook features and apps is self-presentation (Kim & Lee, 2011). People also form impressions based on the number of friends we have and the photos and posts that other people tag us in. All this information floating around can be difficult to manage. So how do we manage the impressions we make digitally given that there is a permanent record?

Research shows that people overall engage in positive and honest self-presentation on Facebook (Kim & Lee, 2011). Since people know how visible the information they post is, they may choose to only reveal things they think will form favorable impressions. But the mediated nature of Facebook also leads some people to disclose more personal information than they might otherwise in such a public or semipublic forum. These hyperpersonal disclosures run the risk of forming negative impressions based on who sees them. In general, the ease of digital communication, not just on Facebook, has presented new challenges for our self-control and information management. Sending someone a sexually provocative image used to take some effort before the age of digital cameras, but now “sexting” an explicit photo only takes a few seconds. So people who would have likely not engaged in such behavior before are more tempted to now, and it is the desire to present oneself as desirable or cool that leads people to send photos they may later regret (DiBlasio, 2012). In fact, new technology in the form of apps is trying to give people a little more control over the exchange of digital information. An iPhone app called “Snapchat” allows users to send photos that will only be visible for a few seconds. Although this isn’t a guaranteed safety net, the demand for such apps is increasing, which illustrates the point that we all now leave digital trails of information that can be useful in terms of our self-presentation but can also create new challenges in terms of managing the information floating around from which others may form impressions of us.

1. What impressions do you want people to form of you based on the information they can see on your Facebook page?
2. Have you ever used social media or the Internet to do “research” on a person? What things would you find favorable and unfavorable?
3. Do you have any guidelines you follow regarding what information about yourself you will put online or not? If so, what are they? If not, why?

Key Takeaways

- Our self-concept is the overall idea of who we think we are. It is developed through our interactions with others and through social comparison that allows us to compare our beliefs and behaviors to others.
- Our self-esteem is based on the evaluations and judgments we make about various characteristics of our self-concept. It is developed through an assessment and evaluation of our various skills and abilities, known as self-efficacy, and through a comparison and evaluation of who we are, who we would like to be, and who we should be (self-discrepancy theory).
- Social comparison theory and self-discrepancy theory affect our self-concept and self-esteem because through comparison with others and comparison of our actual, ideal, and ought selves we make judgments about who we are and our self-worth. These judgments then affect how we communicate and behave.
- Socializing forces like family, culture, and media affect our self-perception because they give us feedback on who we are. This feedback can be evaluated positively or negatively and can lead to positive or negative patterns that influence our self-perception and then our communication.
- Self-presentation refers to the process of strategically concealing and/or revealing personal information in order to influence others' perceptions. Prosocial self-presentation is intended to benefit

others and self-serving self-presentation is intended to benefit the self at the expense of others. People also engage in self-enhancement, which is a self-presentation strategy by which people intentionally seek out positive evaluations.

Exercises

1. Make a list of characteristics that describe who you are (your self-concept). After looking at the list, see if you can come up with a few words that summarize the list to narrow in on the key features of your self-concept. Go back over the first list and evaluate each characteristic, for example noting whether it is something you do well/poorly, something that is good/bad, positive/negative, desirable/undesirable. Is the overall list more positive or more negative? After doing these exercises, what have you learned about your self-concept and self-esteem?
2. Discuss at least one time in which you had a discrepancy or tension between two of the three selves described by self-discrepancy theory (the actual, ideal, and ought selves). What effect did this discrepancy have on your self-concept and/or self-esteem?
3. Take one of the socializing forces discussed (family, culture, or media) and identify at least one positive and one negative influence that it/they have had on

your self-concept and/or self-esteem.

4. Getting integrated: Discuss some ways that you might strategically engage in self-presentation to influence the impressions of others in an academic, a professional, a personal, and a civic context.

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2.4 Culture and Identity

Learning Objectives

1. Define culture.
2. Define personal, social, and cultural identities.
3. Summarize nondominant and dominant identity development.
4. Explain why difference matters in the study of culture and identity.

Culture is a complicated word to define, as there are at least six common ways that culture is used in the United States. For the purposes of exploring the communicative aspects of culture, we will define culture as the *ongoing negotiation of learned and patterned beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors*. Unpacking the definition, we can see that culture shouldn't be conceptualized as stable and unchanging. Culture is "negotiated," and as we will learn later in this chapter, culture is dynamic, and cultural changes can be traced and analyzed to better understand why our society is the way it is. The definition also points out that culture is learned, which accounts for the importance of socializing institutions like family, school, peers, and the media. Culture is patterned in that there are recognizable widespread similarities among people within a cultural group. There is also deviation from and resistance to those patterns by individuals and subgroups within a culture, which is why cultural patterns change over time. Last, the definition acknowledges that culture influences our beliefs about what is true and false, our attitudes including our likes and dislikes, our values regarding what is right and wrong, and our behaviors. It is from these cultural influences that our identities are formed.

Personal, Social, and Cultural Identities

Ask yourself the question "Who am I?" Recall from our earlier discussion of self-concept that we develop a sense of who we are based on what is reflected back on us from other people. Our parents, friends, teachers, and the media help shape our identities. While this happens from birth, most people in Western societies reach a stage in adolescence where maturing cognitive abilities and increased social awareness lead them to begin to reflect on who they are. This begins a lifelong process of thinking about who we are now, who we were before, and who we will become (Tatum, B. D., 2000). Our identities make up an important part of our self-concept and can be broken down into three main categories: personal, social, and cultural identities (see Table 8.1 "Personal, Social, and Cultural Identities").

We must avoid the temptation to think of our identities as constant. Instead, our identities are formed through processes that started before we were born and will continue after we are gone; therefore our identities aren't something we achieve or complete. Two related but distinct components of our identities are our personal and social identities (Spreckels, J. & Kotthoff, H., 2009). *Personal identities* include the components of self that are primarily intrapersonal and connected to our life experiences. For example, I consider myself a puzzle lover, and you may identify as a fan of hip-hop music. Our *social identities* are the components of self that are derived from involvement in social groups with which we are interpersonally committed.

Pledging a fraternity or sorority is an example of a social identity.

Adaenn – CC BY-NC 2.0.

For example, we may derive aspects of our social identity from our family or from a community of fans for a sports team. Social identities differ from personal identities because they are externally organized through membership. Our membership may be voluntary (Greek organization on campus) or involuntary (family) and explicit (we pay dues to our labor union) or implicit (we purchase and listen to hip-hop music). There are innumerous options for personal and social identities. While our personal identity choices express who we are, our social identities align us with particular groups. Through our social identities, we make statements about who we are and who we are not.

Table 8.1 Personal, Social, and Cultural Identities

Personal	Social	Cultural
Antique Collector	Member of Historical Society	Irish American
Dog Lover	Member of Humane Society	Male/Female
Cyclist	Fraternity/Sorority Member	Greek American
Singer	High School Music Teacher	Multiracial
Shy	Book Club Member	Heterosexual
Athletic		Gay/Lesbian

Personal identities may change often as people have new experiences and develop new interests and hobbies. A current interest in online video games may give way to an interest in graphic design. Social identities do not change as often because they take more time to develop, as you must become interpersonally invested. For example, if an interest in online video games leads someone to become a member of a MMORPG, or a massively multiplayer online role-playing game community, that personal identity has led to a social identity that is now interpersonal and more entrenched. Cultural identities are based on socially constructed categories that teach us a way of being and include expectations for social behavior or ways of acting (Yep, G. A., 2002). Since we are often a part of them since birth, cultural identities are the least changeable of the three. The ways of being and the social expectations for behavior within cultural identities do change over time, but what separates them from most social identities is their historical roots (Collier, M. J., 1996). For example, think of how ways of being and acting have changed for African Americans since the civil rights movement. Additionally, common ways of being and acting within a cultural identity group are expressed through communication. In order to be accepted as a member of a cultural group, members must be *acculturated*, essentially learning and using a code that other group members will be able to recognize. We are acculturated into our various cultural identities in obvious and less obvious ways. We may literally have a parent or friend tell us what it means to be a man or a woman. We may also unconsciously consume messages from popular culture that offer representations of gender.

Any of these identity types can be ascribed or avowed. *Ascribed identities* are personal, social, or cultural identities that are placed on us by others, while *avowed identities* are those that we claim for ourselves (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). Sometimes people ascribe an identity to someone else based on stereotypes. You may see a person who likes to read science-fiction books, watches documentaries, has glasses, and collects Star Trek memorabilia and label him or her a nerd. If the person doesn't avow that identity, it can create friction, and that label may even hurt the other person's feelings. But ascribed and avowed identities can match up. To extend the previous example, there has been a movement in recent years to reclaim the label *nerd* and turn it into a positive, and a nerd subculture has been growing in popularity. For example, MC Frontalot, a leader in the nerdcore hip-hop movement, says that being branded a nerd in school was terrible, but now he raps about "nerdy" things like blogs to sold-out crowds (Shipman, 2007). We can see from this example that our ascribed and avowed identities change over the course of our lives, and sometimes they match up and sometimes not.

Although some identities are essentially permanent, the degree to which we are aware of them, also known as salience, changes. The intensity with which we avow an identity also changes based on context. For example, an African American may not have difficulty deciding which box to check on the demographic section of a survey. But if an African American becomes President of her college's Black Student Union, she may more intensely avow her African American identity, which has now become more salient. If she studies abroad in Africa her junior year, she may be ascribed an identity of American by her new African friends rather than African American. For the Africans, their visitor's identity as American is likely more salient than her identity as someone of African descent. If someone is biracial or multiracial, they may change their racial identification as they engage in an identity search. One intercultural communication scholar writes of his experiences as an "Asianlatinoamerican" (Yep, 2002). He notes repressing his Chinese identity as an adolescent living in Peru and then later embracing his Chinese identity and learning about his family history while in college in the United States. This example shows how even national identity fluctuates. Obviously one can change nationality by becoming a citizen of another country, although most people do not.

Throughout modern history, cultural and social influences have established dominant and nondominant groups (Allen, 2011). Dominant identities historically had and currently have more resources and influence, while nondominant identities historically had and currently have less resources and influence. It's important to remember that these distinctions are being made at the societal level, not the individual level. There are obviously exceptions, with people in groups considered nondominant obtaining more resources and power than a person in a dominant group. However, the overall trend is that difference based on cultural groups has been institutionalized, and exceptions do not change this fact. Because of this uneven distribution of resources and power, members of dominant groups are granted privileges while nondominant groups are at a disadvantage. The main nondominant groups must face various forms of institutionalized discrimination, including racism, sexism, heterosexism, and ableism. As we will discuss later, privilege and disadvantage, like similarity and difference, are not "all or nothing." No two people are completely different or completely similar, and no one person is completely privileged or completely disadvantaged.

Identity Development

There are multiple models for examining identity development. Given our focus on how difference matters, we will examine similarities and differences in nondominant and dominant identity formation. While the stages in this model help us understand how many people experience their identities, identity development is complex, and there may be variations. We must also remember that people have multiple identities that intersect with each other. So, as you read, think about how circumstances may be different for an individual with multiple nondominant and/or dominant identities.

Nondominant Identity Development

There are four stages of nondominant identity development (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). The first stage is *unexamined identity*, which is characterized by a lack of awareness of or lack of interest in one's identity. For example, a young woman who will later identify as a lesbian may not yet realize that a nondominant sexual orientation is part of her identity. Also, a young African American man may question his teachers or parents about the value of what he's learning during Black History Month. When a person's lack of interest in their own identity is replaced by an investment in a dominant group's identity, they may move to the next stage, which is conformity.

In the *conformity stage*, an individual internalizes or adopts the values and norms of the dominant group, often in an effort not to be perceived as different. Individuals may attempt to assimilate into the dominant culture by changing their appearance, their mannerisms, the way they talk, or even their name. Moises, a Chicano man interviewed in a research project about identities, narrated how he changed his "Mexican sounding" name to Moses, which was easier for his middle-school classmates and teachers to say (Jones Jr., 2009). He also identified as white instead of Mexican American or Chicano because he saw how his teachers treated the other kids with "brown skin." Additionally, some gay or lesbian people in this stage of identity development may try to "act straight."

In either case, some people move to the next stage, resistance and separation, when they realize that despite their efforts they are still perceived as different by and not included in the dominant group.

In the *resistance and separation stage*, an individual with a nondominant identity may shift away from the conformity of the previous stage to engage in actions that challenge the dominant identity group. Individuals in this stage may also actively try to separate themselves from the dominant group, interacting only with those who share their nondominant identity. For example, there has been a Deaf culture movement in the United States for decades. This movement includes people who are hearing impaired and believe that their use of a specific language, American Sign Language (ASL), and other cultural practices constitutes a unique culture, which they symbolize by capitalizing the *D* in *Deaf* (Allen, 2011).

Many hearing-impaired people in the United States use American Sign Language (ASL), which is recognized as an official language.

While this is not a separatist movement, a person who is hearing impaired may find refuge in such a group after experiencing discrimination from hearing people. Staying in this stage may indicate a lack of critical thinking if a person endorses the values of the nondominant group without question.

The *integration stage* marks a period where individuals with a nondominant identity have achieved a balance between embracing their own identities and valuing other dominant and nondominant identities. Although there may still be residual anger from the discrimination and prejudice they have faced, they may direct this energy into positive outlets such as working to end discrimination for their own or other groups. Moises, the Chicano man mentioned earlier, now works to support the Chicano community in his city and also has actively supported gay rights and women's rights.

Dominant Identity Development

Dominant identity development consists of five stages (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). The *unexamined stage* of dominant identity formation is similar to nondominant in that individuals in this stage do not think about their or others' identities. Although they may be aware of differences—for example, between races and genders—they either don't realize there is a hierarchy that treats some people differently than others or they don't think the hierarchy applies to them. For example, a white person may take notice that a person of color was elected to a prominent office. However, he or she may not see the underlying reason that it is noticeable—namely, that the overwhelming majority of our country's leaders are white. Unlike people with a nondominant identity who usually have to acknowledge the positioning of their identity due to discrimination and prejudice they encounter, people with dominant identities may stay in the unexamined stage for a long time.

In the *acceptance stage*, a person with a dominant identity passively or actively accepts that some people are treated differently than others but doesn't do anything internally or externally to address it. In the passive acceptance stage, we must be cautious not to blame individuals with dominant identities for internalizing racist, sexist, or heterosexist "norms." The socializing institutions we discussed earlier (family, peers, media, religion, and education) often make oppression seem normal and natural. For example, I have had students who struggle to see that they are in this stage say things like "I know that racism exists, but my parents taught me to be a good person and see everyone as equal." While this is admirable, seeing everyone as equal doesn't make it so. The person making these statements acknowledges difference but doesn't see their privilege or the institutional perpetuation of various "-isms." Although I've encountered many more people in the passive state of acceptance than the active state, some may progress to an active stage where they acknowledge inequality and are proud to be in the "superior" group. In either case, many people never progress from this stage. If they do, it's usually because of repeated encounters with individuals or situations that challenge their acceptance of the status quo, such as befriending someone from a nondominant group or taking a course related to culture.

The *resistance stage* of dominant identity formation is a major change from the previous in that an individual acknowledges the unearned advantages they are given and feels guilt or shame about it. Having taught about various types of privilege for years, I've encountered many students who want to return their privilege or disown it. These individuals may begin to disassociate with their own dominant group because they feel like a curtain has been opened and their awareness of the inequality makes it difficult for them to interact with others in their dominant group. While moving to this step is a marked improvement in regards to becoming a more aware and socially just person, getting stuck in the resistance stage isn't productive, because people are often retreating rather than trying to address injustice. For some, deciding to share what they've learned with others who share their dominant identity moves them to the next stage.

People in the *redefinition stage* revise negative views of their identity held in the previous stage and begin to acknowledge their privilege and try to use the power they are granted to work for social justice. They realize that they can claim their dominant identity as heterosexual, able-bodied, male, white, and so on, and perform their identity in ways that counter norms. A male participant in a research project on identity said the following about redefining his male identity:

I don't want to assert my maleness the same way that maleness is asserted all around us all the time. I don't want to contribute to sexism. So I have to be conscious of that. There's that guilt. But then, I try to utilize my maleness in positive ways, like when I'm talking to other men about male privilege (Jones, Jr., 2009).

The final stage of dominant identity formation is *integration*. This stage is reached when redefinition is complete and people can integrate their dominant identity into all aspects of their life, finding opportunities to educate others about privilege while also being a responsive ally to people in nondominant identities. As an example, some heterosexual people who find out a friend or family member is gay or lesbian may have to confront their dominant heterosexual identity for the first time, which may lead them through these various stages. As a sign of integration, some may join an organization like PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), where they can be around others who share their dominant identity as heterosexuals but also empathize with their loved ones.

Heterosexual people with gay family members or friends may join the group PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) as a part of the redefinition and/or integration stage of their dominant identity development.

Jason Riedy – Atlanta Pride Festival parade – CC BY 2.0.

Knowing more about various types of identities and some common experiences of how dominant and nondominant identities are formed prepares us to delve into more specifics about why the difference matters.

Difference Matters

Whenever we encounter someone, we notice similarities and differences. While both are important, it is often the differences that are highlighted and that contribute to communication troubles. We don't only see similarities and differences on an individual level. In fact, we also place people into in-groups and out-groups based on the similarities and differences we perceive. This is important because we then tend to react to someone we perceive as a member of an out-group based on the characteristics we attach to the group rather than the individual (Allen, 2011). In these situations, it is more likely that stereotypes and prejudice will influence our communication. Learning about difference and why it matters will help us be more competent communicators. The flip side of emphasizing difference is to claim that no differences exist and that you see everyone as a human being. Rather than trying to ignore difference and see each person as a unique individual, we should know the history of how differences came to be so socially and culturally significant and how they continue to affect us today.

Culture and identity are complex. You may be wondering how some groups came to be dominant and others nondominant. These differences are not natural, which can be seen as we unpack how various identities have changed over time in the next section. There is, however, an ideology of domination that makes it seem natural and normal to many that some people or groups will always have power over others (Allen, 2011). In fact, hierarchy and domination, although prevalent throughout modern human history, were likely not the norm among early humans. So one of the first reasons difference matters is that people and groups are treated unequally, and better understanding how those differences came to be can help us create a more just society. Difference also matters because demographics and patterns of interaction are changing.

In the United States, the population of people of color is increasing and diversifying, and visibility for people who are gay or lesbian and people with disabilities has also increased. The 2010 Census shows that the Hispanic and Latino/a populations in the United States are now the second largest group in the country, having grown 43 percent since the last census in 2000 (Saenz, 2011). By 2030, racial and ethnic minorities will account for one-third of the population (Allen, 2011). Additionally, legal and social changes have created a more open environment for sexual minorities and people with disabilities. These changes directly affect our interpersonal relationships. The workplace is one context where changing demographics has become increasingly important. Many organizations are striving to comply with changing laws by implementing policies aimed at creating equal access and opportunity. Some organizations are going further than legal compliance to try to create inclusive climates where diversity is valued because of the interpersonal and economic benefits it has the potential to produce.

"Getting Real"

Diversity Training

Businesses in the United States spend $200 to $300 million a year on diversity training, but is it effective? (Vedantam, 2008) If diversity training is conducted to advance a company's business goals and out of an understanding of the advantages that a diversity of background and thought offer a company, then the training is more likely to be successful. Many companies conduct mandatory diversity training based on a belief that they will be in a better position in court if a lawsuit is brought against them. However, research shows that training that is mandatory and undertaken only to educate people about the legal implications of diversity is ineffective and may even hurt diversity efforts. A commitment to a diverse and inclusive workplace environment must include a multipronged approach. Experts recommend that a company put a staff person in charge of diversity efforts, and some businesses have gone as far as appointing a "chief diversity officer" (Cullen, 2007). The US Office of Personnel

Management offers many good guidelines for conducting diversity training: create learning objectives related to the mission of the organization, use tested and appropriate training methods and materials, provide information about course content and expectations to employees ahead of training, provide the training in a supportive and non-coercive environment, use only experienced and qualified instructors, and monitor/evaluate training and revise as needed (US Office of Personnel Management, 2011). With these suggestions in mind, the increasingly common "real-world" event of diversity training is more likely to succeed.

1. Have you ever participated in any diversity training? If so, what did you learn or take away from the training? Which of the guidelines listed did your training do well or poorly on?
2. Do you think diversity training should be mandatory or voluntary? Why?
3. From what you've learned so far in this book, what communication skills are important for a diversity trainer to have?

Difference matters due to the inequalities that exist among cultural groups and due to changing demographics that affect our personal and social relationships. Unfortunately, there are many obstacles that may impede our valuing of difference (Allen, 2011). Individuals with dominant identities may not validate the experiences of those in nondominant groups because they do not experience the oppression directed at those with nondominant identities. Further, they may find it difficult to acknowledge that not being aware of this oppression is due to privilege associated with their dominant identities. Because of this lack of recognition of oppression, members of dominant groups may minimize, dismiss, or question the experiences of nondominant groups. Recall from our earlier discussion of identity formation that people with dominant identities may stay in the unexamined or acceptance stages for a long time. Being stuck in these stages makes it much more difficult to value difference.

Members of nondominant groups may have difficulty valuing difference due to negative experiences with the dominant group, such as not having their experiences validated. Both groups may be restrained from communicating about difference due to norms of political correctness, which may make people feel afraid to speak up because they may be perceived as insensitive or racist. All these obstacles are common and they are valid. However, as we will learn later, developing intercultural communication competence can help us gain new perspectives, become more mindful of our communication, and intervene in some of these negative cycles.

Key Takeaways

- Culture is an ongoing negotiation of learned patterns of beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors.
- Each of us has personal, social, and cultural identities.
    - Personal identities are components of self that are primarily intrapersonal and connect to our individual interests and life experiences.
    - Social identities are components of self that are derived from our involvement in social groups to which we are interpersonally invested.
    - Cultural identities are components of self

based on socially constructed categories that teach us a way of being and include expectations for our thoughts and behaviors.

- Nondominant identity formation may include a person moving from unawareness of the importance of their identities, to adopting the values of dominant society, to separating from dominant society, to integrating components of identities.
- Dominant identity formation may include a person moving from unawareness of their identities, to accepting the identity hierarchy, to separation from and guilt regarding the dominant group, to redefining and integrating components of identities.
- Difference matters because people are treated differently based on their identities and demographics and patterns of interaction are changing. Knowing why and how this came to be and how to navigate our increasingly diverse society can make us more competent communicators.

Exercises

1. List some of your personal, social, and cultural identities. Are there any that relate? If so, how? For your cultural identities, which ones are dominant and which ones are nondominant? What would a person who looked at this list be able to tell about you?

2. Describe a situation in which someone ascribed an identity to you that didn't match with your avowed identities. Why do you think the person ascribed the identity to you? Were there any stereotypes involved?
3. Getting integrated: Review the section that explains why difference matters. Discuss the ways in which difference may influence how you communicate in each of the following contexts: academic, professional, and personal.

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2.5 Exploring Specific Cultural Identities

Learning Objectives

1. Define the social constructionist view of culture and identity.
2. Trace the historical development and construction of the four cultural identities discussed.
3. Discuss how each of the four cultural identities discussed affects and/or relates to communication.

We can get a better understanding of current cultural identities by unpacking how they came to be. By looking at history, we can see how cultural identities that seem to have existed forever actually came to be constructed for various political and social reasons and how they have changed over time. Communication plays a central role in this construction. As we have already discussed, our identities are relational and communicative; they are also constructed. *Social constructionism* is a view that argues the self is formed through our interactions with others and in relation to social, cultural, and political contexts (Allen, 2011). In this section, we'll explore how the cultural identities of race, gender, sexual orientation, and ability have been constructed in the United States and how communication relates to those identities. There are other important identities that could be discussed, like religion, age, nationality, and class. Although they are not given their own section, consider how those identities may intersect with the identities discussed next.

Race

Would it surprise you to know that human beings, regardless of how they are racially classified, share 99.9 percent of their DNA? This finding by the Human Genome Project asserts that race is a social construct, not a biological one. The American Anthropological Association agrees, stating that race is the product of "historical and contemporary social, economic, educational, and political circumstances" (Allen, 2011). Therefore, we'll define race as a socially constructed category based on differences in appearance that has been used to create hierarchies that privilege some and disadvantage others.

There is actually no biological basis for racial classification among humans, as we share 99.9 percent of our DNA.

Race didn't become a socially and culturally recognized marker until European colonial expansion in the 1500s. As Western Europeans traveled to parts of the world previously unknown to them and encountered people who were different from them, a hierarchy of races began to develop that placed lighter skinned Europeans above darker skinned people. At the time, newly developing fields in natural and biological sciences took interest in examining the new locales, including the plant and animal life, natural resources, and native populations. Over the next three hundred years, science that we would now undoubtedly recognize as flawed, biased, and racist legitimated notions that native populations were less evolved than white Europeans, often calling them savages. In fact, there were scientific debates as to whether some of the native populations should be considered human or animal. Racial distinctions have been based largely on phenotypes, or physiological features such as skin color, hair texture, and body/facial features. Western "scientists" used these differences as "proof" that native populations were less evolved than the Europeans, which helped justify colonial expansion, enslavement, genocide, and exploitation on massive scales (Allen, 2011). Even though there is a consensus among experts that race is social rather than biological, we can't deny that race still has meaning in our society and affects people as if it were "real."

Given that race is one of the first things we notice about someone, it's important to know how race and communication relate (Allen, 2011). Discussing race in the United States is difficult for many reasons. One is due to uncertainty about language use. People may be frustrated by their perception that labels change too often or be afraid of using an "improper" term and being viewed as racially insensitive. It is important, however, that we not let political correctness get in the way of meaningful dialogues and learning opportunities related to difference. Learning some of the communicative history of race can make us more competent communicators and open us up to more learning experiences.

Racial classifications used by the government and our regular communication about race in the United States have changed frequently, which further points to the social construction of race. Currently, the primary racial groups in the United States are African American, Asian American, European American, Latino/a, and Native American, but a brief look at changes in how the US Census Bureau has defined race clearly shows that this hasn't always been the case (see Table 8.2 "Racial Classifications in the US Census"). In the 1900s alone, there were twenty-six different ways that race was categorized on census forms (Allen, 2011). The way we communicate about race in our regular interactions has also changed, and many people are still hesitant to discuss race for fear of using "the wrong" vocabulary.

Table 8.2 Racial Classifications in the US Census

Year(s)	**Development**
1790	No category for race
1800s	Race was defined by the percentage of African "blood." *Mulatto* was one black and one white parent, *quadroon* was one-quarter African blood, and *octoroon* was one-eighth.
1830–1940	The term *color* was used instead of *race*.
1900	Racial categories included white, black, Chinese, Japanese, and Indian. Census takers were required to check one of these boxes based on visual cues. Individuals did not get to select a racial classification on their own until 1970.
1950	The term *color* was dropped and replaced by *race*.
1960, 1970	Both *race* and *color* were used on census forms.
1980–2010	*Race* again became the only term.
2000	Individuals were allowed to choose more than one racial category for the first time in census history.
2010	The census included fifteen racial categories and an option to write in races not listed on the form.

Source: Adapted from Brenda J. Allen, *Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2011), 71–72.

The five primary racial groups noted previously can still be broken down further to specify a particular region, country, or nation. For example, Asian Americans are diverse in terms of country and language of origin and cultural practices. While the category of Asian Americans can be useful when discussing broad trends, it can also generalize among groups, which can lead to stereotypes. You may find that someone identifies as Chinese American or Korean American instead of Asian American. In this case, the label further highlights a person's cultural lineage. We should not assume, however, that someone identifies with his or her cultural lineage, as many people have more in common with their US American peers than a culture that may be one or more generations removed.

History and personal preference also influence how we communicate about race. Culture and communication scholar Brenda Allen notes that when she was born in 1950, her birth certificate included an N for Negro. Later she referred to herself as *colored* because that's what people in her community referred to themselves as. During and before this time, the term *black* had negative connotations and would likely have offended someone. There was a movement in the 1960s to reclaim the word *black*, and the slogan "black is beautiful" was commonly used. Brenda Allen acknowledges the label of *African American* but notes that she still prefers *black*. The terms *colored* and *Negro* are no longer considered appropriate because they were commonly used during a time when black people were blatantly discriminated against. Even though that history may seem far removed to some, it is not to others. Currently, the terms *African American* and *black* are frequently used. The phrase *people of color* is acceptable for most and is used to be inclusive of other racial minorities. If you are unsure what to use, you could always observe how a person refers to himself or herself, or you could ask for his or her preference. In any case, a competent communicator defers to and respects the preference of the individual.

The label *Latin American* generally refers to people who live in Central American countries. Although Spain colonized much of what is now South and Central America and parts of the Caribbean, the inhabitants of these areas are now much more diverse. Depending on the region or country, some people primarily trace their lineage to the indigenous people who lived in these areas before colonization, or to a Spanish and indigenous lineage, or to other combinations that may include European, African, and/or indigenous heritage. *Latina* and *Latino* are labels that are preferable to *Hispanic* for many who live in the United States and trace their lineage to South and/or Central America and/or parts of the Caribbean. Scholars who study Latina/o identity often use the label *Latina/o* in their writing to acknowledge women who avow that identity label (Calafell, 2007). In verbal communication, you might say "Latina" when referring to a particular female or "Latino" when referring to a particular male of Latin American heritage. When referring to the group as a whole, you could say "Latinas and Latinos" instead of just "Latinos," which would be more gender-inclusive. While *Hispanic* is used by the US Census, it refers primarily to people of Spanish origin, which doesn't account for the diversity of background of many Latinos/as. The term *Hispanic* also highlights the colonizer's influence over the indigenous, which erases a history that is important to many. Additionally, there are people who claim Spanish origins and identify culturally as Hispanic but racially as white. Labels such as *Puerto Rican* or *Mexican American*, which further specify region or country of origin, may also be used. Just as with other cultural groups, if you are unsure of how to refer to someone, you can always ask for and honor someone's preference.

The history of immigration in the United States also ties to the way that race has been constructed. The metaphor of the melting pot has been used to describe the immigration history of the United States but doesn't capture the experiences of many immigrant groups (Allen, 2011). Generally, immigrant groups who were white, or light skinned, and spoke English were better able to assimilate or melt into the melting pot. But immigrant groups that we might think of as white today were not always considered so. Irish immigrants were discriminated against and even portrayed as black in cartoons that appeared in newspapers. In some Southern states, Italian immigrants were forced to go to black schools, and it wasn't until 1952 that Asian immigrants were allowed to become citizens of the United States. All this history is important because it continues to influence communication among races today.

Interracial Communication

Race and communication are related in various ways. Racism influences our communication about race and is not an easy topic for most people to discuss. Today, people tend to view racism as overt acts such as calling someone a derogatory name or discriminating against someone in thought or action. However, there is a difference between racist acts, which we can attach to an individual, and institutional racism, which is not as easily identifiable. It is much easier for people to recognize and decry racist actions than it is to realize that racist patterns and practices go through societal institutions, which means that racism exists and doesn't have to be committed by any one person. As competent communicators and critical thinkers, we must challenge ourselves to be aware of how racism influences our communication at individual and societal levels.

We tend to make assumptions about people's race based on how they talk, and often these assumptions are based on stereotypes. Dominant groups tend to define what is correct or incorrect usage of a language, and since language is so closely tied to identity, labeling a group's use of a language as incorrect or deviant challenges or negates part of their identity (Yancy, 2011). We know there isn't only one way to speak English, but there have been movements to identify a standard. This becomes problematic when we realize that "standard English" refers to a way of speaking English that is based on white, middle-class ideals that do not match up with the experiences of many. When we create a standard for English, we can label anything that deviates from that "nonstandard English." Differences between standard English and what has been called "Black English" have gotten national attention through debates about whether or not instruction in classrooms should accommodate students who do not speak standard English. Education plays an important role in language acquisition, and class relates to access to education. In general, whether someone speaks standard English themselves or not, they tend to negatively judge people whose speech deviates from the standard.

Another national controversy has revolved around the inclusion of Spanish in common language use, such as Spanish as an option at ATMs, or other automated services, and Spanish language instruction in school for students who don't speak or are learning to speak English. As was noted earlier, the Latino/a population in the United States is growing fast, which has necessitated the inclusion of Spanish in many areas of public life. This has also created a backlash, which some scholars argue is tied more to the race of the immigrants than the language they speak and fear that white America could be engulfed by other languages and cultures (Speicher, 2002). This backlash has led to a revived movement to make English the official language of the United States.

The "English only" movement of recent years is largely a backlash targeted at immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.
Courtesy of www.CGPGrey.com.

The US Constitution does not stipulate a national language, and Congress has not designated one either. While nearly thirty states have passed English-language legislation, it has mostly been symbolic, and court rulings have limited any enforceability (Zuckerman, 2010). The Linguistic Society of America points out that immigrants are very aware of the social and economic advantages of learning English and do not need to be forced. They also point out that the United States has always had many languages represented, that national unity hasn't rested on a single language and that there are actually benefits to having a population that is multilingual (Linguistic Society of America, 2011). Interracial communication presents some additional verbal challenges.

Code-switching involves changing from one way of speaking to another between or within interactions. Some people of color may engage in code-switching when communicating with dominant group members because they fear they will be negatively judged. Adopting the language practices of the dominant group may minimize perceived differences. This code-switching creates a linguistic dual consciousness in which people are able to maintain their linguistic identities with their in-group peers but can still acquire tools and gain access needed to function in a dominant society (Yancy, 2011).

Gender

When we first meet a newborn baby, we ask whether it's a boy or a girl. This question illustrates the importance of gender in organizing our social lives and our interpersonal relationships. A family became aware of the deep emotions people feel about gender and the great discomfort people feel when they can't determine gender when they announced to the world that they were not going to tell anyone the gender of their baby, aside from the baby's siblings. Their desire for their child, named Storm, to be able to experience early life without the boundaries and categories of gender brought criticism from many (Davis & James, 2011). Conversely, many parents consciously or unconsciously "code" their newborns in gendered ways based on our society's associations of pink clothing and accessories with girls and blue with boys. While it's obvious to most people that colors aren't gendered, they take on new meaning when we assign gendered characteristics of masculinity and femininity to them. Just like race, gender is a socially constructed category. While it is true that there are biological differences between who we label male and female, the meaning our society places on those differences is what actually matters in our day-to-day lives. And the biological differences are interpreted differently around the world, which further shows that although we think gender is a natural, normal, stable way of classifying things, it is actually not. There is a long history of appreciation for people who cross gender lines in Native American and South Central Asian cultures, to name just two.

You may have noticed the use of the word *gender* instead of *sex*.

That's because gender is an identity based on internalized cultural notions of masculinity and femininity that is constructed through communication and interaction. There are two important parts of this definition to unpack. First, we internalize notions of gender based on socializing institutions, which helps us form our gender identity. Then we attempt to construct that gendered identity through our interactions with others, which is our gender expression. Sex is based on biological characteristics, including external genitalia, internal sex organs, chromosomes, and hormones (Wood, 2005). While the biological characteristics between men and women are obviously different, it's the meaning that we create and attach to those characteristics that makes them significant. The cultural differences in how that significance is ascribed are proof that "our way of doing things" is arbitrary. For example, cross-cultural research has found that boys and girls in most cultures show both aggressive and nurturing tendencies, but cultures vary in terms of how they encourage these characteristics between genders. In a group in Africa, young boys are responsible for taking care of babies and are encouraged to be nurturing (Wood, 2005).

Gender has been constructed over the past few centuries in political and deliberate ways that have tended to favor men in terms of power. And various academic fields joined in the quest to "prove" there are "natural" differences between men and women. While the "proof" they presented was credible to many at the time, it seems blatantly sexist and inaccurate today. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, scientists who measure skulls, also known as craniometrists, claimed that men were more intelligent than women because they had larger brains. Leaders in the fast-growing fields of sociology and psychology argued that women were less evolved than men and had more in common with "children and savages" than adult (white) males (Allen, 2011). Doctors and other decision makers like politicians also used women's menstrual cycles as evidence that they were irrational, or hysterical, and therefore couldn't be trusted to vote, pursue higher education, or be in a leadership position. These are just a few of the many instances of how knowledge was created by seemingly legitimate scientific disciplines that we can now clearly see served to empower men and disempower women. This system is based on the ideology of patriarchy, which is a system of social structures and practices that maintains the values, priorities, and interests of men as a group (Wood, 2005). One of the ways patriarchy is maintained is by its relative invisibility. While women have been the focus of much research on gender differences, males have been largely unexamined. Men have been treated as the "generic" human being to which others are compared. But that ignores the fact that men have a gender, too. Masculinities studies have challenged that notion by examining how masculinities are performed.

There have been challenges to the construction of gender in recent decades. Since the 1960s, scholars and activists have challenged established notions of what it means to be a man or a woman. The women's rights movement in the United States dates back to the 1800s, when the first women's rights convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848 (Wood, 2005). Although most women's rights movements have been led by white, middle-class women, there was overlap between those involved in the abolitionist movement to end slavery and the beginnings of the women's rights movement. Although some of the leaders of the early women's rights movement had class and education privileges, they were still taking a risk by organizing and protesting. Black women were even more at risk, and Sojourner Truth, an emancipated slave, faced those risks often and gave a much noted speech at a women's rights gathering in Akron, Ohio, in 1851, which came to be called "Ain't I a Woman?" (Wood, 2005) Her speech highlighted the multiple layers of oppression faced by black women. You can watch actress Alfre Woodard deliver an interpretation of the speech in Video Clip 8.1.

Video Clip 8.1

Alfre Woodard Interprets Sojourner Truth's Speech "Ain't I a Woman?"

<a data-iframe-code=" //youtube.com/watch?v=4vr_vKsk_h8" " href="http://youtube.com/watch?v=4vr_vKsk_h8″ class="replaced-iframe">(click to see video)

Feminism as an intellectual and social movement advanced women's rights and our overall understanding of gender. Feminism has gotten a bad reputation based on how it has been portrayed in the media and by some politicians. When I teach courses about gender, I often ask my students to raise their hand if they consider themselves feminists. I usually only have a few, if any, who do. I've found that students I teach are hesitant to identify as a feminist because of the connotations of the word. However, when I ask students to raise their hand if they believe women have been treated unfairly and that there should be more equity, most students raise their hand. Gender and communication scholar Julia Wood has found the same trend and explains that a desire to make a more equitable society for everyone is at the root of feminism. She shares comments from a student that capture this disconnect: (Wood, 2005)

I would never call myself a feminist, because that word has so many negative connotations. I don't hate men or anything, and I'm not interested in protesting. I don't want to go around with hacked-off hair and no makeup and sit around bashing men. I do think women should have the same kinds of rights, including equal pay for equal work. But I wouldn't call myself a feminist.

It's important to remember that there are many ways to be a feminist and to realize that some of the stereotypes about feminism are rooted in sexism and homophobia, in that feminists are reduced to "men haters" and often presumed to be lesbians. The feminist movement also gave some momentum to the transgender rights movement. *Transgender* is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression do not match the gender they were assigned by birth. Transgender people may or may not seek medical intervention like surgery or hormone treatments to help match their physiology with their gender identity. The term *transgender* includes other labels such as *transsexual*, *transvestite*, *cross-dresser*, and *intersex*, among others. As with other groups, it is best to allow someone to self-identify first and then honor their preferred label. If you are unsure of which pronouns to use when addressing someone, you can use gender-neutral language or you can use the pronoun that matches with how they are presenting. If someone has long hair, make-up, and a dress on, but you think their biological sex is male due to other cues, it may be polite to address them with female pronouns since that is the gender identity they are expressing.

Gender as a cultural identity has implications for many aspects of our lives, including real-world contexts like education and work. Schools are primary grounds for socialization, and the educational experience for males and females is different in many ways from preschool through college. Although not always intentional, schools tend to recreate the hierarchies and inequalities that exist in society. Given that we live in a patriarchal society, there are communicative elements present in school that support this (Allen, 2011). For example, teachers are more likely to call on and pay attention to boys in a classroom, giving them more feedback in the form of criticism, praise, and help. This sends an implicit message that boys are more worthy of attention and valuable than girls. Teachers are also more likely to lead girls to focus on feelings and appearance and boys to focus on competition and achievement. The focus on appearance for girls can lead to anxieties about body image. Gender inequalities are also evident in the administrative structure of schools, which puts males in positions of authority more than females. While females make up 75 percent of the educational workforce, only 22 percent of superintendents and 8 percent of high school principals are women. Similar trends exist in colleges and universities, with women only accounting for 26 percent of full professors. These inequalities in schools correspond to larger inequalities in the general workforce. While there are more women in the workforce now than ever before, they still face a glass ceiling, which is a barrier to promotion to upper management. Many students have been surprised at the continuing pay gap that exists between men and women. In 2010, women earned about seventy-seven cents to every dollar earned by men (National Committee on Pay Equity, 2011). To put this into perspective, the National Committee on Pay Equity started an event called Equal Pay Day. In 2011, Equal Pay Day was on April 11. This signifies that for a woman to earn the same amount of money a man earned in a year, she would have to work more than three months extra, until April 11, to make up for the difference (National Committee on Pay Equity, 2011).

Sexuality

While race and gender are two of the first things we notice about others, sexuality is often something we view as personal and private. Although many people hold the view that a person's sexuality should be kept private, this isn't a reality for our society. One only needs to observe popular culture and media for a short time to see that sexuality permeates much of our public discourse.

Sexuality relates to culture and identity in important ways that extend beyond sexual orientation, just as race is more than the color of one's skin and gender is more than one's biological and physiological manifestations of masculinity and femininity. Sexuality isn't just physical; it is social in that we communicate with others about sexuality (Allen, 2011). Sexuality is also biological in that it connects to physiological functions that carry significant social and political meaning like puberty, menstruation, and pregnancy. Sexuality connects to public health issues like sexually transmitted infections (STIs), sexual assault, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and teen pregnancy. Sexuality is at the center of political issues like abortion, sex education, and gay and lesbian rights. While all these contribute to sexuality as a cultural identity, the focus in this section is on sexual orientation.

The most obvious way sexuality relates to identity is through sexual orientation. *Sexual orientation* refers to a person's primary physical and emotional sexual attraction and activity. The terms we most often use to categorize sexual orientation are *heterosexual*, *gay*, *lesbian*, and *bisexual*. Gays, lesbians, and bisexuals are sometimes referred to as sexual minorities. While the term *sexual preference* has been used previously, *sexual orientation* is more appropriate, since *preference* implies a simple choice. Although someone's preference for a restaurant or actor may change frequently, sexuality is not as simple. The term *homosexual* can be appropriate in some instances, but it carries with it a clinical and medicalized tone. As you will see in the timeline that follows, the medical community has a recent history of "treating homosexuality" with means that most would view as inhumane today. So many people prefer a term like *gay*, which was chosen and embraced by gay people, rather than *homosexual*, which was imposed by a then discriminatory medical system.

The gay and lesbian rights movement became widely recognizable in the United States in the 1950s and continues on today, as evidenced by prominent issues regarding sexual orientation in national news and politics. National and international groups like the Human Rights Campaign advocate for rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) communities. While these communities are often grouped together within one acronym (LGBTQ), they are different. Gays and lesbians constitute the most visible of the groups and receive the most attention and funding. Bisexuals are rarely visible or included in popular cultural discourses or in social and political movements. Transgender issues have received much more attention in recent years, but transgender identity connects to gender more than it does to sexuality. Last, *queer* is a term used to describe a group that is diverse in terms of identities but usually takes a more activist and at times radical stance that critiques sexual categories. While *queer* was long considered a derogatory label, and still is by some, the queer activist movement that emerged in the 1980s and early 1990s reclaimed the word and embraced it as a positive. As you can see, there is a diversity of identities among sexual minorities, just as there is variation within races and genders.

As with other cultural identities, notions of sexuality have been socially constructed in different ways throughout human history. Sexual orientation didn't come into being as an identity category until the late 1800s. Before that, sexuality was viewed in more physical or spiritual senses that were largely separate from a person's identity. Table 8.3 "Developments Related to Sexuality, Identity, and Communication" traces some of the developments relevant to sexuality, identity, and communication that show how this cultural identity has been constructed over the past 3,000 years.

Table 8.3 Developments Related to Sexuality, Identity, and Communication

Year(s)	Development
1400 BCE–565 BCE	During the Greek and Roman era, there was no conception of sexual orientation as an identity. However, sexual relationships between men were accepted for some members of society. Also at this time, Greek poet Sappho wrote about love between women.
533	Byzantine Emperor Justinian makes adultery and same-sex sexual acts punishable by death.
1533	Civil law in England indicates the death penalty can be given for same-sex sexual acts between men.
1810	Napoleonic Code in France removes all penalties for any sexual activity between consenting adults.
1861	England removes death penalty for same-sex sexual acts.
1892	The term *heterosexuality* is coined to refer a form of "sexual perversion" in which people engage in sexual acts for reasons other than reproduction.
1897	Dr. Magnus Hirschfield founds the Scientific Humanitarian Committee in Berlin. It is the first gay rights organization.
1900–1930	Doctors "treat" homosexuality with castration, electro-shock therapy, and incarceration in mental hospitals.
1924	The first gay rights organization in the United States, the Chicago Society for Human Rights, is founded.
1933–44	Tens of thousands of gay men are sent to concentration camps under Nazi rule. The prisoners are forced to wear pink triangles on their uniforms. The pink triangle was later reclaimed as a symbol of gay rights.
1934	The terms *heterosexuality* and *homosexuality* appear in Webster's dictionary with generally the same meaning the terms hold today.
1948	American sexologist Alfred Kinsey's research reveals that more people than thought have engaged in same-sex sexual activity. His research highlights the existence of bisexuality.
1969	On June 27, patrons at the Stonewall Inn in New York City fight back as police raid the bar (a common practice used by police at the time to harass gay people). "The Stonewall Riot," as it came to be called, was led by gay, lesbian, and transgender patrons of the bar, many of whom were working class and/or people of color.
1974	The American Psychiatric Association removes its reference to homosexuality as a mental illness.

Year(s)	Development
1999	The Vermont Supreme Court rules that the state must provide legal rights to same-sex couples. In 2000, Vermont becomes the first state to offer same-sex couples civil unions.
2003	The US Supreme Court rules that Texas's sodomy law is unconstitutional, which effectively decriminalizes consensual same-sex relations.
2011	The US military policy "Don't Ask Don't Tell" is repealed, allowing gays and lesbians to serve openly.

Source: Adapted from Brenda J. Allen, *Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2011), 117–25; and University of Denver Queer and Ally Commission, "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, and Queer History," *Queer Ally Training Manual*, 2008.

Ability

There is resistance to classifying ability as a cultural identity because we follow a medical model of disability that places disability as an individual and medical rather than social and cultural issue. While much of what distinguishes able-bodied and cognitively able from disabled is rooted in science, biology, and physiology, there are important sociocultural dimensions. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines an individual with a disability as "a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment" (Allen, 2011). An impairment is defined as "any temporary or permanent loss or abnormality of a body structure or function, whether physiological or psychological" (Allen, 2011). This definition is important because it notes the social aspect of disability in that people's life activities are limited and the relational aspect of disability in that the perception of a disability by others can lead someone to be classified as such. Ascribing an identity of disabled to a person can be problematic. If there is a mental or physical impairment, it should be diagnosed by a credentialed expert. If there isn't an impairment, then the label of *disabled* can have negative impacts, as this label carries social and cultural significance. People are tracked into various educational programs based on their physical and cognitive abilities, and there are many cases of people being mistakenly labeled disabled who were treated differently despite their protest of the ascribed label. Students who did not speak English as a first language, for example, were—and perhaps still are—sometimes put into special education classes.

Ability, just as the other cultural identities discussed, has institutionalized privileges and disadvantages associated with it. Ableism is the system of beliefs and practices that produces a physical and mental standard that is projected as normal for a human being and labels deviations from it abnormal, resulting in unequal treatment and access to resources. Ability privilege refers to the unearned advantages that are provided for people who fit the cognitive and physical norms (Allen, 2011). I once attended a workshop about ability privilege led by a man who was visually impaired. He talked about how, unlike other cultural identities that are typically stable over a lifetime, ability fluctuates for most people. We have all experienced times when we are more or less able.

Perhaps you broke your leg and had to use crutches or a wheelchair for a while. Getting sick for a prolonged period of time also lessens our abilities, but we may fully recover from any of these examples and regain our ability privilege. Whether you've experienced a short-term disability or not, the majority of us will become less physically and cognitively able as we get older.

Statistically, people with disabilities make up the largest minority group in the United States, with an estimated 20 percent of people five years or older living with some form of disability (Allen, 2011). Medical advances have allowed some people with disabilities to live longer and more active lives than before, which has led to an increase in the number of people with disabilities. This number could continue to increase, as we have thousands of veterans returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan with physical disabilities or psychological impairments such as posttraumatic stress disorder.

As recently disabled veterans integrate back into civilian life, they will be offered assistance and accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

As disability has been constructed in US history, it has intersected with other cultural identities. For example, people opposed to "political and social equality for women cited their supposed physical, intellectual, and psychological flaws, deficits, and deviations from the male norm." They framed women as emotional, irrational, and unstable, which was used to put them into the "scientific" category of "feeblemindedness," which led them to be institutionalized (Carlson, 2001). Arguments supporting racial inequality and tighter immigration restrictions also drew on notions of disability, framing certain racial groups as prone to mental retardation, mental illness, or uncontrollable emotions and actions. See Table 8.4 "Developments Related to Ability, Identity, and Communication" for a timeline of developments related to ability, identity, and communication. These thoughts led to a dark time in US history, as the eugenics movement sought to limit reproduction of people deemed as deficient.

Table 8.4 Developments Related to Ability, Identity, and Communication

Year(s)	Development
400 BCE	The Greeks make connections between biology, physiology, and actions. For example, they make a connection between epilepsy and a disorder of the mind but still consider the source to be supernatural or divine.
30–480	People with disabilities are viewed with pity by early Christians and thought to be so conditioned because of an impurity that could possibly be addressed through prayer.
500–1500	As beliefs in the supernatural increase during the Middle Ages, people with disabilities are seen as manifestations of evil and are ridiculed and persecuted.
1650–1789	During the Enlightenment, the first large-scale movements toward the medical model are made, as science and medicine advance and society turns to a view of human rationality.
1900s	The eugenics movement in the United States begins. Laws are passed to sterilize the "socially inadequate," and during this time, more than sixty thousand people were forcibly sterilized in thirty-three states.
1930s	People with disabilities become the first targets of experimentation and mass execution by the Nazis.
1970s	The independent living movement becomes a prominent part of the disability rights movement.
1990	The Americans with Disabilities Act is passed through Congress and signed into law.

Source: Maggie Shreve, "The Movement for Independent Living: A Brief History," *Independent Living Research Utilization*, accessed October 14, 2011, http://ilru.org/html/publications/infopaks/IL_paradigm.doc.

During the early part of the 1900s, the eugenics movement was the epitome of the move to rehabilitate or reject people with disabilities (Allen, 2005). This was a brand of social engineering that was indicative of strong public support in the rationality of science to cure society's problems (Allen, 2011). A sterilization law written in

1914 “proposed to authorize sterilization of the socially inadequate,” which included the “feebleminded, insane, criminalistic, epileptic, inebriate, diseased, blind, deaf, deformed, and dependent” (Lombardo, 2011). During the eugenics movement in the United States, more than sixty thousand people in thirty-three states were involuntarily sterilized (Allen, 2011). Although the eugenics movement as it was envisioned and enacted then is unthinkable today, some who have studied the eugenics movement of the early 1900s have issued warnings that a newly packaged version of eugenics could be upon us. As human genome mapping and DNA manipulation become more accessible, advanced genetic testing could enable parents to eliminate undesirable aspects or enhance desirable characteristics of their children before they are born, creating “designer children” (Spice, 2005).

Much has changed for people with disabilities in the United States in the past fifty years. The independent living movement (ILM) was a part of the disability rights movement that took shape along with other social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The ILM calls for more individual and collective action toward social change by people with disabilities. Some of the goals of the ILM include reframing disability as a social and political rather than just a medical issue, a shift toward changing society rather than just rehabilitating people with disabilities, a view of accommodations as civil rights rather than charity, and more involvement by people with disabilities in the formulation and execution of policies relating to them (Longmore, 2003). As society better adapts to people with disabilities, there will be more instances of interability communication taking place.

Interability communication is communication between people with differing ability levels; for example, a hearing person communicating with someone who is hearing impaired or a person who doesn’t use a wheelchair communicating with someone who uses a wheelchair. Since many people are unsure of how to communicate with a person with disabilities, the following are the “Ten Commandments of Etiquette for Communicating with People with Disabilities" to help you in communicating with persons with disabilities:[1]

1. When talking with a person with a disability, speak directly to that person rather than through a companion or sign-language interpreter.
2. When introduced to a person with a disability, it is appropriate to offer to shake hands. People with limited hand use or an artificial limb can usually shake hands. (Shaking hands with the left hand is an acceptable greeting.)
3. When meeting a person who is visually impaired, always identify yourself and others who may be with you. When conversing in a group, remember to identify the person to whom you are speaking.
4. If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted. Then listen to or ask for instructions.
5. Treat adults as adults. Address people who have disabilities by their first names only when extending the same familiarity to all others. (Never patronize people who use wheelchairs by patting them on the head or shoulder.)
6. Leaning on or hanging on to a person's wheelchair is similar to leaning or hanging on to a person and is generally considered annoying. The chair is part of the personal body space of the person who uses it.
7. Listen attentively when you're talking with a person who has difficulty speaking. Be patient and wait for the person to finish, rather than correcting or speaking for the person. If necessary, ask short questions that require short answers, a nod, or a

1. "Effective Interaction: Communication with and about People with Disabilities in the Workplace," accessed November 5, 2012, http://www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/effectiveinteraction.htm#.UJgp8RjqJJ8.

shake of the head. Never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty doing so. Instead, repeat what you have understood and allow the person to respond. The response will clue you in and guide your understanding.

8. When speaking with a person who uses a wheelchair or a person who uses crutches, place yourself at eye level in front of the person to facilitate the conversation.
9. To get the attention of a person who is deaf, tap the person on the shoulder or wave your hand. Look directly at the person and speak clearly, slowly, and expressively to determine if the person can read your lips. Not all people who are deaf can read lips. For those who do lip read, be sensitive to their needs by placing yourself so that you face the light source and keep hands, cigarettes, and food away from your mouth when speaking.
10. Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use accepted, common expressions such as "See you later" or "Did you hear about that?" that seem to relate to a person's disability. Don't be afraid to ask questions when you're unsure of what to do.

Key Takeaways

- The social constructionist view of culture and identity states that the self is formed through our interactions with others and in relation to social, cultural, and political contexts.
- Race, gender, sexuality, and ability are socially constructed cultural identities that developed over time in relation to historical, social, and political contexts.
- Race, gender, sexuality, and ability are cultural

identities that affect our communication and our relationships.

Exercises

1. Do you ever have difficulty discussing different cultural identities due to terminology? If so, what are your uncertainties? What did you learn in this chapter that can help you overcome them?
2. What comes to mind when you hear the word *feminist*? How did you come to have the ideas you have about feminism?
3. How do you see sexuality connect to identity in the media? Why do you think the media portrays sexuality and identity the way it does?
4. Think of an instance in which you had an interaction with someone with a disability. Would knowing the "Ten Commandments for Communicating with People with Disabilities" have influenced how you communicated in this instance? Why or why not?

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2.6 Media, the Self, and Relationships

Learning Objectives

1. Discuss the relationship between new media and the self.
2. Identify positive and negative impacts of new media on our interpersonal relationships.

Think about some ways that new media have changed the way you think about yourself and the way you think about and interact in your relationships. Have you ever given your Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok a "once-over" before you send or accept a friend request just to make sure that the content displayed is giving off the desired impression? The technological changes of the past twenty years have affected you and your relationships whether you are a heavy user or not. Even people who don't engage with technology as much as others are still affected by it, since the people they interact with use and are affected by new media to varying degrees.

New Media and the Self

The explicit way we become conscious of self-presentation when using new media, social networking sites (SNSs) in particular, may lead to an increase in self-consciousness. You'll recall that in

Chapter 1 “Introduction to Communication Studies” we talked about the role that communication plays in helping us meet our identity needs and, in Chapter 2 “Communication and Perception”, the role that self-discrepancy theory plays in self-perception. The things that we “like” on social media, the pictures we are tagged in, and the news stories or jokes that we share all come together to create a database of information that new and old friends can access to form and reform impressions of us. Because we know that others are making impressions based on this database of information and because we have control over most of what appears in this database, people may become overfocused on crafting their online presence to the point that they neglect their offline relationships. This extra level of self-consciousness has also manifested in an increase in self-image and self-esteem issues for some users. For example, some cosmetic surgeons have noted an uptick in patients coming in to have facial surgeries or procedures specifically because they don’t like the way their chin looks on the webcam while chatting on Skype or because they feel self-conscious about the way they look in the numerous digital pictures that are now passed around and stored on new media. Since new media are being increasingly used in professional capacities, some people are also seeking cosmetic surgery or procedures as a way of investing in their personal brand or as a way of giving them an edge in a tight job market (Roy, 2012).

The personal and social nature of new media also creates an openness that isn’t necessarily part of our offline social reality. Some people try to address this problem by creating more than one social media account. People may also have difficulty managing their different commitments, especially if they develop a dependence on or even addiction to new media devices and/or platforms. New media blur the lines between personal and professional in many ways, which can be positive and negative. For example, the constant connection offered by laptops and smartphones increases the expectation that people will continue working from home or while on vacation. At the same time, however, people may use new media for non-work-related purposes while at work, which may help even out the work/life balance. Cyberslacking, which is the non-work-related use of new media while on the job, is seen as a problem in many organizations and workplaces. However, some research shows that occasional use of new media for personal reasons while at work can have positive effects, as it may relieve boredom, help reduce stress, or lead to greater job satisfaction (Vitak, Crouse, & LaRose, 2011).

The constant availability of the Internet allows people to engage in a wide variety of cyberslacking at work, such as online gaming, shopping, and chatting.

Pexel.com – CC0 public domain.

Personal media devices bring with them a sense of constant connectivity that makes us "reachable" nearly all the time and can be comforting or anxiety inducing. Devices such as smartphones and computers, and platforms such as e-mail, Instagram, and the web, are within an arm's reach of many people. While this can be convenient and make things more efficient in some cases, it can also create a dependence that we might not be aware of until those connections are broken or become unreliable. You don't have to look too far to see people buried in their smartphones, tablets, or laptops all around. While some people have learned to rely on peripheral vision in order to text and walk at the same time, others aren't so graceful. In fact, London saw the creation of a "text safe" street with padding on street signs and lamp poles to help prevent injuries when people inevitably bump into them while engrossed in their gadgets' screens. Follow this link to read a story in *Time* magazine and see a picture of the street: http://www.time.com/time/business/article/0,8599,1724522,00.html. Additionally, a survey conducted in the United Kingdom found that being away from social networks causes more anxiety than being a user of them. Another study found that 73 percent of people would panic if they lost their smartphone (Fitzgerald, 2012).

Of course, social media can also increase self-esteem or have other social benefits. A recent survey of fifteen thousand women found that 48 percent of the respondents felt that social media helped them stay in touch with others while also adding a little stress in terms of overstimulation. Forty-two percent didn't mention the stress of overstimulation and focused more on the positive effects of being in touch with others and the world in general. When asked about how social media affects their social lives, 30 percent of the women felt that increased use of social media helped them be more social offline as well (Kintzer, 2012). Other research supports this finding for both genders, finding that Facebook can help people with social anxiety feel more confident and socially connected (Ryan & Xenos, 2011).

New Media and Interpersonal Relationships

How do new media affect our interpersonal relationships, if at all? This is a question that has been addressed by scholars, commentators, and people in general. To provide some perspective, similar questions and concerns have been raised along with each major change in communication technology. New media, however, have been the primary communication change of the past few generations, which likely accounts for the attention they receive. Some scholars in sociology have decried the negative effects of new technology on society and relationships in particular, saying that the quality of relationships is deteriorating and the strength of connections is weakening (Richardson & Hessey, 2009).

Facebook greatly influenced our use of the word *friend*, although people's conceptions of the word may not have changed as much. When someone "friends you" on Facebook, it doesn't automatically mean that you now have the closeness and intimacy that you have with some offline friends. And research shows that people don't regularly accept friend requests from or send them to people they haven't met, preferring instead to have met a person at least once (Richardson & Hessey, 2009). Some users, though, especially adolescents, engage in what is called "friend-collecting behavior," which entails users friending people they don't know personally or that they wouldn't talk to in person in order to increase the size of their online network (Christofides, Muise, & Desmarais, 2012). As we will discuss later, this could be an impression management strategy, as the user may assume that a large number of Facebook friends will make him or her appear more popular to others.

Although many have critiqued the watering down of the term *friend* when applied to Social networking sites (SNSs), specifically Facebook, some scholars have explored how the creation of these networks affects our interpersonal relationships and may even restructure how we think about our relationships. Even though a person may have hundreds of Facebook friends that he or she doesn't regularly interact with on- or offline, just knowing that the network exists in a somewhat tangible form (catalogued on Facebook) can be comforting. Even the people who are distant acquaintances but are "friends" on SNS can serve important functions. Rather than users seeing these connections as pointless, frivolous, or stressful, they are often comforting background presences. A dormant network is a network of people with whom users may not feel obligated to explicitly interact but may find comfort in knowing the connections exist. Such networks can be beneficial, because when needed, a person may be able to more easily tap into that dormant network than they would an offline extended network. It's almost like being friends on SNS keeps the communication line open, because both people can view the other's profile and keep up with their lives even without directly communicating. This can help sustain tenuous friendships or past friendships and prevent them from fading away, which as we learned in Chapter 7 "Communication in Relationships" is a common occurrence as we go through various life changes.

A key part of interpersonal communication is impression management, and some forms of new media allow us more tools for presenting ourselves than others. SNS in many ways are platforms for self-presentation. Even more than blogs, web pages, and smartphones, the environment on an SNS like Facebook or Twitter facilitates self-disclosure in a directed way and allows others who have access to our profile to see our other "friends." This convergence of different groups of people (close friends, family, acquaintances, friends of friends, colleagues, and strangers) can present challenges for self-presentation. Research shows half of all US adults have a profile on Facebook or another SNS (Vitak & Ellison). The fact that Facebook is expanding to different generations of users has coined a new phrase—"the graying of Facebook." This is due to a large increase in users over the age of fifty-five. In fact, it has been stated the fastest-growing Facebook user group is women fifty-five and older, which is up more than 175 percent since fall 2008 (Gates, 2009). So now we likely have people from personal, professional, and academic contexts in our Facebook network, and those people are now more likely than ever to be from multiple generations. The growing diversity of our social media networks creates new challenges as we try to engage in impression management.

People fifty-five and older are using new media in increasing numbers.

We should be aware that people form impressions of us based not just on what we post on our profiles but also on our friends and the content that they post on our profiles. In short, as in our offline lives, we are judged online by the company we keep (Walther et al., 2008). The difference is, though, that via Facebook a person (unless blocked or limited by privacy settings) can see our entire online social network and friends, which doesn't happen offline. The information on our profiles is also archived, meaning there is a record the likes of which doesn't exist in offline interactions. Recent research found that a person's perception of a profile owner's attractiveness is influenced by the attractiveness of the friends shown on the profile. In short, a profile owner is judged more physically attractive when his or her friends are judged as physically attractive, and vice versa. The profile owner is also judged as more socially attractive (likable, friendly) when his or her friends are judged as physically attractive. The study also found that complimentary and friendly statements made about profile owners on their wall or on profile comments increased perceptions of the profile owner's social attractiveness and credibility. An interesting, but not surprising, gender double standard also emerged. When statements containing sexual remarks or references to the profile owner's excessive drinking were posted on the profile, perceptions of attractiveness increased if the profile owner was male and decreased if female (Walther et al., 2008).

Self-disclosure is a fundamental building block of interpersonal relationships, and new media make self-disclosures easier for many people because of the lack of immediacy, meaning the fact that a message is sent through electronic means arouses less anxiety or inhibition than would a face-to-face exchange. SNSs provide opportunities for social support. Research has found that Facebook communication behaviors such as "friending" someone or responding to a request posted on someone's wall lead people to feel a sense of attachment and perceive that others are reliable and helpful (Vitak & Ellison). Much of the research on Facebook, though, has focused on the less intimate alliances that we maintain through social media. Since most people maintain offline contact with their close friends and family, Facebook is more of a supplement to interpersonal communication. Since most people's Facebook "friend" networks are composed primarily of people with whom they have less face-to-face contact in their daily lives, Facebook provides an alternative space for interaction that can more easily fit into a person's busy schedule or interest area. For example, to stay connected, both people don't have to look at each other's profiles simultaneously. I often catch up on a friend by scrolling through a couple weeks of timeline posts rather than checking in daily.

The space provided by SNSs can also help reduce some of the stress we feel in regards to relational maintenance or staying in touch by allowing for more convenient contact. The expectations for regular contact with our Facebook friends who are in our extended network are minimal. An occasional comment on a photo or status update or an even easier click on the "like" button can help maintain those relationships. However, when we post something asking for information, help, social support, or advice, those in the extended network may play a more important role and allow us to access resources and viewpoints beyond those in our closer circles. And research shows that many people ask for informational help through their status updates (Vitak & Ellison).

These extended networks serve important purposes, one of which is to provide access to new information and different perspectives than those we may get from close friends and family. For example, since we tend to have significant others that are more similar to than different from us, the people that we are closest to are likely to share many or most of our beliefs, attitudes, and values. Extended contacts, however, may expose us to different political views or new sources of information, which can help broaden our perspectives. The content in this section hopefully captures what I'm sure you have already experienced in your own engagement with new media—that new media have important implications for our interpersonal relationships. Given that, we will end this chapter with a "Getting Competent" feature box that discusses some tips on how to competently use social media.

"Getting Competent"

Using Social Media Competently

We all have a growing log of personal information stored on the Internet, and some of it is under our control and some of it isn't. We also have increasingly diverse social networks that require us to be cognizant of the information we make available and how we present ourselves. While we can't control all the information about ourselves online or the impressions people form, we can more competently engage with social media so that we are getting the most out of it in both personal and professional contexts.

A quick search on Google for "social media dos and don'ts" will yield around 100,000 results, which shows that there's no shortage of advice about how to competently use social media. I'll offer some of the most important dos and don'ts that I found that relate to communication (Doyle, 2012). Feel free to do your own research on specific areas of concern.

Be consistent. Given that most people have multiple social media accounts, it's important to have some degree of consistency. At least at the top level of your profile (the part that isn't limited by privacy settings), include information that you don't mind anyone seeing.

Know what's out there. Since the top level of many social media sites are visible in Google search results, you should monitor how these appear to others by regularly (about once a month) doing a Google search using various iterations of your name. Putting your name in quotation marks will help target your results. Make sure you're logged out of all your accounts and then click on the various results to see what others can see.

Think before you post. Software that enable people to take "screen shots" or download videos and tools that archive web pages can be used without our knowledge to create records of what you post. While it is still a good idea to go through your online content and "clean up" materials that may form unfavorable impressions, it is even a better idea to not put that information out there in the first place. Posting something about how you hate school or your job or a specific person may be done in the heat of the moment and forgotten, but a potential employer might find that information and form a negative impression even if it's months or years old.

Be familiar with privacy settings. If you are trying to expand your social network, it may be counterproductive to put your Facebook or Twitter account on "lockdown," but it is beneficial to know what levels of control you have and to take advantage of them. For example, I have a "Limited Profile" list on Facebook to which I assign new contacts or people with whom I am not very close. You can also create groups of contacts on various social media sites so that only certain people see certain information.

Be a gatekeeper for your network. Do not accept friend requests or followers that you do not know. Not only could these requests be sent from "bots" that might skim your personal info or monitor your activity; they could be from people that might make you look bad. Remember, we learned earlier that people form impressions based on those with whom we are connected. You can always send a private message to someone asking how he or she knows you or do some research by Googling his or her name or username.

1. Identify information that you might want to limit for each of the following audiences: friends, family, and employers.
2. Google your name (remember to use multiple forms and to put them in quotation marks). Do the same with any usernames that are associated with your name (e.g., you can Google your Twitter handle or an e-mail address). What information came up? Were you surprised by anything?
3. What strategies can you use to help manage the impressions you form on social media?

Key Takeaways

- New media affect the self as we develop a higher degree of self-consciousness due to the increased visibility of our lives (including pictures, life events, and communication). The constant connectivity that comes with new media can also help us feel more connected to others and create anxiety due to overstimulation or a fear of being cut off.
- New media affect interpersonal relationships, as conceptions of relationships are influenced by new points of connection such as "being Facebook friends." While some people have critiqued social media for lessening the importance of face-to-face

interaction, some communication scholars have found that online networks provide important opportunities to stay connected, receive emotional support, and broaden our perspectives in ways that traditional offline networks do not.

- Getting integrated: Social networking sites (SNSs) can present interpersonal challenges related to self-disclosure and self-presentation since we use them in academic, professional, personal, and civic contexts. Given that people from all those contexts may have access to our profile, we have to be competent in regards to what we disclose and how we present ourselves to people from different contexts (or be really good at managing privacy settings so that only certain information is available to certain people).

Exercises

1. Discuss the notion that social media has increased our degree of self-consciousness. Do you agree? Why or why not?
2. Do you find the constant connectivity that comes with personal media overstimulating or comforting?
3. Have you noticed a “graying” of social media like Facebook and Twitter in your own networks? What opportunities and challenges are presented by intergenerational interactions on social media?

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2.7 Improving Perception

Learning Objectives

1. Discuss strategies for improving self-perception.
2. Discuss strategies for improving perception of others.
3. Employ perception checking to improve perception of self and others.

So far, we have learned about the perception process and how we perceive others and ourselves. Now we will turn to a discussion of how to improve our perception. Our self-perception can be improved by becoming aware of how schema, socializing forces, self-fulfilling prophecies, and negative patterns of thinking can distort our ability to describe and evaluate ourselves. How we perceive others can be improved by developing better listening and empathetic skills, becoming aware of stereotypes and prejudice, developing self-awareness through self-reflection, and engaging in perception checking.

Improving Self-Perception

Our self-perceptions can and do change. Recall that we have an overall self-concept and self-esteem that are relatively stable, and we also have context-specific self-perceptions. Context-specific self-perceptions vary depending on the person with whom we are interacting, our emotional state, and the subject matter being discussed. Becoming aware of the process of self-perception and the various components of our self-concept (which you have already started to do by studying this chapter) will help you understand and improve your self-perceptions.

Since self-concept and self-esteem are so subjective and personal, it would be inaccurate to say that someone's self-concept is "right" or "wrong." Instead, we can identify negative and positive aspects of self-perceptions as well as discuss common barriers to forming accurate and positive self-perceptions. We can also identify common patterns that people experience that interfere with their ability to monitor, understand, and change their self-perceptions. Changing your overall self-concept or self-esteem is not an easy task given that these are overall reflections on who we are and how we judge ourselves that are constructed over many interactions. A variety of life-changing events can relatively quickly alter our self-perceptions. Think of how your view of self changed when you moved from high school to college. Similarly, other people's self-perceptions likely change when they enter into a committed relationship, have a child, make a geographic move, or start a new job.

Having a child can lead to a major change in a person's self-concept.

Aside from experiencing life-changing events, we can make slower changes to our self-perceptions with concerted efforts aimed at becoming more competent communicators through self-monitoring and reflection. As you actively try to change your self-perceptions, do not be surprised if you encounter some resistance from significant others. When you change or improve your self-concept, your communication will also change, which may prompt other people to respond to you differently. Although you may have good reasons for changing certain aspects of your self-perception, others may become unsettled or confused by your changing behaviors and communication. Remember, people try to increase predictability and decrease uncertainty within personal relationships. For example, many students begin to take their college education more seriously during their junior and senior years. As these students begin to change their self-concept to include the role of "serious student preparing to graduate and enter the professional world," they likely have friends that want to maintain the "semi-serious student who doesn't exert much consistent effort and prefers partying to studying" role that used to be a shared characteristic of both students' self-concepts. As the first student's behavior changes to accommodate this new aspect of his or her self-concept, it may upset the friend who was used to weeknights spent hanging out rather than studying. Let's now discuss some suggestions to help avoid common barriers to accurate and positive self-perceptions and patterns of behavior that perpetuate negative self-perception cycles.

Avoid Reliance on Rigid Schema

As we learned earlier, *schemata* are sets of information based on cognitive and experiential knowledge that guide our interaction. We rely on schemata almost constantly to help us make sense of the world around us. Sometimes schemata become so familiar that we use them as *scripts*, which prompts mindless communication and can lead us to overlook new information that may need to be incorporated into the schema. So it's important to remain mindful of new or contradictory information that may warrant revision of a schema. Being mindful is difficult, however, especially since we often unconsciously rely on schemata. Think about how when you're driving a familiar route you sometimes fall under "highway hypnosis." Despite all the advanced psychomotor skills needed to drive, such as braking, turning, and adjusting to other drivers, we can pull into a familiar driveway or parking lot having driven the whole way on autopilot. Again, this is not necessarily a bad thing. But have you slipped into autopilot on a familiar route only to remember that you are actually going somewhere else after you've already missed your turn? This example illustrates the importance *of keeping our schemata flexible and avoiding mindless communication.*

Be Critical of Socializing Forces

We learned earlier that family, friends, sociocultural norms, and the media are just some of the socializing forces that influence our thinking and therefore influence our self-perception. These powerful forces serve positive functions but can also set into motion negative patterns of self-perception. Two examples (presented below) illustrate the possibility for people to critique and resist socializing forces in order to improve their self-perception. The first deals with physical appearance and notions of health and the second deals with cultural identities and discrimination.

We have already discussed how the media presents us with narrow and often unrealistic standards for attractiveness. Even though most of us know that these standards don't represent what is normal or natural for the human body, we internalize these ideals, which results in various problems ranging from eating disorders, to depression, to poor self-esteem. A relatively overlooked but controversial and interesting movement that has emerged partially in response to these narrow representations of the body is the fat acceptance movement. The fat acceptance movement has been around for more than thirty years, but it has more recently gotten public attention due to celebrities like Oprah Winfrey and Kirstie Alley, who after years of publicly struggling with weight issues have embraced a view that weight does not necessarily correspond to health. Many people have found inspiration in that message and have decided that being healthy and strong is more important than being thin (Katz, 2009). The "Healthy at Every Size" movement and the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance has challenged the narrative put out by the thirty-billion-dollar-a-year weight-loss industry that fat equals lazy, ugly, and unhealthy. Conflicting scientific studies make it difficult to say conclusively how strong the correlation is between weight and health, but it seems clear that a view that promotes healthy living and positive self-esteem over unconditional dieting and a cult of thinness is worth exploring more given the potential public health implications of distorted body image and obesity.

The "Healthy at Every Size" movement strives to teach people that being thin doesn't necessarily mean a person is healthy.

Pixabay – CC0 public domain.

Cultural influences related to identities and difference can also lead to distorted self-perceptions, especially for people who occupy marginalized or oppressed identities. While perception research has often been used to support the notion that individuals who are subjected to discrimination, like racial and ethnic minorities, are likely to have low self-esteem because they internalize negative societal views, this is not always the case (Armenta & Hunt, 2009). In fact, even some early perception research showed that some minorities do not just passively accept the negative views society places on them. Instead, they actively try to maintain favorable self-perceptions in the face of discriminatory attitudes. Numerous studies have shown that people in groups that are the targets of discrimination may identify with their in-group more because of this threat, which may actually help them maintain psychological well-being. In short, they reject the negative evaluations of the out-group and find refuge and support in their identification with others who share their marginalized status.

Beware of Self-Fulfilling Prophecies

Self-fulfilling prophecies are thought and action patterns in which a person's false belief triggers a behavior that makes the initial false belief actually or seemingly come true (Guyll et al., 2010). For example, let's say a student's biology lab instructor is a Chinese person who speaks English as a second language. The student falsely believes that the instructor will not be a good teacher because he speaks English with an accent. Because of this belief, the student doesn't attend class regularly and doesn't listen actively when she does attend. Because of these behaviors, the student fails the biology lab, which then reinforces her original belief that the instructor wasn't a good teacher.

Although the concept of self-fulfilling prophecies was originally developed to be applied to social inequality and discrimination, it has since been applied in many other contexts, including interpersonal communication. This research has found that some people are chronically insecure, meaning they are very concerned about being accepted by others but constantly feel that other people will dislike them. This can manifest in relational insecurity, which is again based on feelings of inferiority resulting from social comparison with others perceived to be more secure and superior. Such people often end up reinforcing their belief that others will dislike them because of the behaviors triggered by their irrational beliefs. Take the following scenario as an example: An insecure person assumes that his date will not like him. During the date, he doesn't engage in much conversation, discloses negative information about himself, and exhibits anxious behaviors. Because of these behaviors, his date forms a negative impression and suggests they not see each other again, reinforcing his original belief that the date wouldn't like him. The example shows how a pattern of thinking can lead to a pattern of behavior that reinforces the thinking, and so on. Luckily, experimental research shows that self-affirmation techniques can be successfully used to intervene in such self-fulfilling prophecies. Thinking positive thoughts and focusing on personality strengths can stop this negative cycle of thinking and has been shown to have positive effects on academic performance, weight loss, and interpersonal relationships (Stinston et al., 2011).

Create and Maintain Supporting Interpersonal Relationships

Aside from giving yourself affirming messages to help with self-perception, it is important to find interpersonal support. Although most people have at least some supportive relationships, many people also have people in their lives who range from negative to toxic. When people find themselves in negative relational cycles, whether it is with friends, family, or romantic partners, it is difficult to break out of those cycles. But we can all make choices to be around people that will help us be who we want to be and not be around people who hinder our self-progress. This notion can also be taken to the extreme, however. It would not be wise to surround yourself with people who only validate you and do not constructively challenge you, because this too could lead to distorted self-perceptions.

Overcoming Barriers to Perceiving Others

There are many barriers that prevent us from competently perceiving others. While some are more difficult to overcome than others, they can all be addressed by raising our awareness of the influences around us and committing to monitoring, reflecting on, and changing some of our communication habits. Whether it is our lazy listening skills, lack of empathy, or stereotypes and prejudice, various filters and blinders influence how we perceive and respond to others.

Develop Empathetic Listening Skills

Effective listening is not easy, and most of us do not make a concerted effort to overcome common barriers to listening. Our fast-paced lives and cultural values that emphasize speaking over listening sometimes make listening feel like a chore. But we shouldn't underestimate the power of listening to make someone else feel better and to open our perceptual field to new sources of information. Empathetic listening can also help us expand our self- and social awareness by learning from other people's experiences and taking on different perspectives. Empathetic listening is challenging because it requires both cognitive and emotional investment that goes beyond the learning of a skill set. We will revisit effective listening in chapter 6.

Beware of Stereotypes and Prejudice

Stereotypes are sets of beliefs that we develop about groups, which we then apply to individuals from that group. Stereotypes are schemata that are taken too far, as they reduce and ignore a person's individuality and the diversity present within a larger group of people. Stereotypes can be based on cultural identities, physical appearance, behavior, speech, beliefs, and values, among other things, and are often caused by a lack of information about the target person or group (Guyll et al., 2010). Stereotypes can be positive, negative, or neutral, but all run the risk of lowering the quality of our communication.

While the negative effects of stereotypes are pretty straightforward in that they devalue people and prevent us from adapting and revising our schemata, positive stereotypes also have negative consequences. For example, the "model minority" stereotype has been applied to some Asian cultures in the United States. Seemingly positive stereotypes of Asian Americans as hardworking, intelligent, and willing to adapt to "mainstream" culture are not always received as positive and can lead some people within these communities to feel objectified, ignored, or overlooked.

Stereotypes can also lead to double standards that point to larger cultural and social inequalities. There are many more words to describe a sexually active female than a male, and the words used for females are disproportionately negative, while those used for males are more positive. Since stereotypes are generally based on a lack of information, we must take it upon ourselves to gain exposure to new kinds of information and people, which will likely require us to get out of our comfort zones. When we do meet people, we should base the impressions we make on describable behavior rather than inferred or secondhand information. When stereotypes negatively influence our overall feelings and attitudes about a person or group, prejudiced thinking results.

Prejudice surrounding the disease we now know as AIDS delayed government investment in researching its causes and developing treatments.

Sassy mom – AIDS Awareness – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Prejudice is negative feelings or attitudes toward people based on their identity or identities. Prejudice can have individual or widespread negative effects. At the individual level, a hiring manager may not hire a young man with a physical disability (even though that would be illegal if it were the only reason), which negatively affects that one man. However, if pervasive cultural thinking that people with physical disabilities are mentally deficient leads hiring managers all over the country to make similar decisions, then the prejudice has become a social injustice. In another example, when the disease we know today as AIDS started killing large numbers of people in the early 1980s, the response by some health and government officials was influenced by prejudice. Since the disease was primarily affecting gay men, Haitian immigrants, and drug users, the disease was prejudged to be a disease that affected only "deviants" and therefore didn't get the same level of attention it would have otherwise. It took many years, investment of much money, and education campaigns to help people realize that HIV and AIDS do not prejudge based on race or sexual orientation and can affect any human.

Engage in Self-Reflection

A good way to improve your perceptions and increase your communication competence, in general, is to engage in self-reflection. If a communication encounter doesn't go well and you want to know why, your self-reflection will be much more useful if you are aware of and can recount your thoughts and actions.

Self-reflection can also help us increase our cultural awareness. Our thought process regarding culture is often "other focused," meaning that the culture of the other person or group is what stands out in our perception. However, the old adage "know thyself" is appropriate, as we become more aware of our own culture by better understanding other cultures and perspectives. Developing cultural self-awareness often requires us to get out of our comfort zones. Listening to people who are different from us is a key component of developing self-knowledge. This may be uncomfortable, because our taken-for-granted or deeply held beliefs and values may become less certain when we see the multiple perspectives that exist.

We can also become more aware of how our self-concepts influence how we perceive others. We often hold other people to the standards we hold for ourselves or assume that their self-concept should be consistent with our own. For example, if you consider yourself a neat person and think that sloppiness in your personal appearance would show that you are unmotivated, rude, and lazy, then you are likely to think the same of a person you judge to have a sloppy appearance. So asking questions like "Is my impression based on how this person wants to be, or how I think this person should want to be?" can lead to enlightening moments of self-reflection. Asking questions in general about the perceptions you are making is an integral part of perception checking, which we will discuss next.

Perception Checking

Perception checking is a strategy to help us monitor our reactions to and perceptions about people and communication. There are some internal and external strategies we can use to engage in perception checking. In terms of internal strategies, review the various influences on perception that we have learned about in this chapter and always be willing to ask yourself, "What is influencing the perceptions I am making right now?" Even being aware of what influences are acting on our perceptions makes us more aware of what is happening in the perception process. In terms of external strategies, we can use other people to help verify our perceptions.

The cautionary adage "Things aren't always as they appear" is useful when evaluating your own perceptions. Sometimes it's a good idea to bounce your thoughts off someone, especially if the perceptions relate to some high-stakes situation.

The Tony Award–winning play *Doubt: A Parable* and the Academy Award–winning movie based on it deal with the interplay of perception, doubt, and certainty. In the story, which is set in a Bronx, New York, Catholic school in 1964, a young priest with new ideas comes into the school, which is run by a traditional nun who, like many, is not fond of change. The older nun begins a campaign to get the young priest out of her school after becoming convinced that he has had an inappropriate relationship with one of the male students. No conclusive evidence is offered during the course of the story, and the audience is left, as are the characters in the story, to determine for themselves whether or not the priest is "guilty." The younger priest doesn't fit into the nun's schema of how a priest should look and act. He has longer fingernails than other priests, he listens to secular music, and he takes three sugars in his tea. A series of perceptions like this lead the nun to certainty of the priest's guilt, despite a lack of concrete evidence. Although this is a fictional example, it mirrors the process of and problems with inaccurate perceptions.

"Getting Competent"

Perception Checking

Perception checking helps us slow down perception and communication processes and allows us to have more control over both. Perception checking involves being able to describe what is happening in a given situation, provide multiple interpretations of events or behaviors, and ask yourself and others questions for clarification. Some of this process happens inside our heads, and some happens through interaction. Let's take an interpersonal conflict as an example.

Stefano and Patrick are roommates. Stefano is in the living room playing a video game when he sees Patrick walk through the room with his suitcase and walk out the front door. Since Patrick didn't say or wave good-bye, Stefano has to make sense of this encounter, and perception checking can help him do that. First, he needs to try to describe (not evaluate yet) what just happened. This can be done by asking yourself, "What is going on?" In this case, Patrick left without speaking or waving good-bye. Next, Stefano needs to think of some possible interpretations of what just happened. One interpretation could be that Patrick is mad about something (at him or someone else). Another could be that he was in a hurry and simply forgot, or that he didn't want to interrupt the video game. In this step of perception checking, it is good to be aware of the attributions you are making. You might try to determine if you are overattributing internal or external causes. Lastly, you will want to verify and clarify. So Stefano might ask a mutual friend if she knows what might be bothering Patrick or going on in his life that made him leave so suddenly. Or he may also just want to call, text, or speak to Patrick. During this step, it's important to be aware of punctuation. Even though Stefano has already been thinking about this incident, and is experiencing some conflict, Patrick may have no idea that his actions caused Stefano to worry. If Stefano texts and asks why he's mad (which wouldn't be a good idea because it's an assumption) Patrick may become defensive, which could escalate the conflict. Stefano could just describe the behavior (without judging Patrick) and ask for clarification by saying, “When you left today you didn’t say bye or let me know where you were going. I just wanted to check to see if things are OK.”

The steps of perception checking as described in the previous scenario are as follows:

- Step 1: Describe **the behavior or situation** without evaluating or judging it.
- Step 2: Think of some **possible interpretations** of the behavior, being aware of attributions and other influences on the perception process.
- Step 3: Verify what happened and **ask for clarification** from the other person’s perspective. Be aware of punctuation, since the other person likely experienced the event differently than you.

1. Getting integrated: Give an example of how perception checking might be useful to you in academic, professional, personal, and civic contexts.
2. Which step of perception checking do you think is the most challenging and why?

Key Takeaways

- We can improve self-perception by avoiding reliance on rigid schemata, thinking critically about socializing institutions, intervening in self-fulfilling prophecies, and finding supportive interpersonal networks.

- We can improve our perceptions of others by developing empathetic listening skills, becoming aware of stereotypes and prejudice, and engaging in self-reflection.
- Perception checking is a strategy that allows us to monitor our perceptions of and reactions to others and communication.

Exercises

1. Which barrier(s) to self-perception do you think present the most challenge to you and why? What can you do to start to overcome these barriers?
2. Which barrier(s) to perceiving others do you think present the most challenge to you and why? What can you do to start to overcome these barriers?
3. Recount a recent communication encounter in which perception checking may have led to a more positive result. What could you have done differently?

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PART III

CHAPTER 3: VERBAL COMMUNICATION

In my junior year of college, I took a course in semantics, which focused on verbal language and solidified my interest in language. I love learning about the history of words, learning new words, and seeing how language changes over time and from one context to the next. Judging from the recent explosion of interest in word game apps like Words with Friends and Scramble with Friends, I'm not alone in my love of language. In this chapter, we'll learn about the relationship between language and meaning, how we come to know the content and rules of verbal communication, the functions of language, how to use words well, and the relationship between language and culture.

MAKE THIS PERSONAL

3.1 Language and Meaning

Learning Objectives

1. Explain how the triangle of meaning describes the symbolic nature of language.
2. Discuss the function of the rules of language.
3. Determine how language shapes the way we think.

The relationship between language and meaning is not a straightforward one. One reason for this complicated relationship is the limitlessness of modern language systems like English (Crystal, 2005). Language is productive in the sense that there is an infinite number of utterances we can make by connecting existing words in new ways. In addition, there is no limit to a language's vocabulary, as new words are coined daily. Of course, words aren't the only things we need to communicate, and although verbal and nonverbal communication are closely related in terms of how we make meaning, nonverbal communication is not productive and limitless. Although we can only make a few hundred physical signs, we have about a million words in the English language. So with all these possibilities, how does communication generate meaning?

You'll recall that "generating meaning" was a central part of the definition of communication we learned earlier. We arrive at meaning through the interaction between our nervous and sensory systems and some stimulus outside of them. It is here, between what the communication models we discussed earlier labeled as encoding and decoding, that meaning is generated as sensory information is interpreted. The indirect and sometimes complicated relationship between language and meaning can lead to confusion, frustration, or maybe humor. We may even experience a little of all three when we stop to think about how there are some twenty-five definitions available to tell us the meaning of word *meaning* (Crystal, 2005). Since language and symbols are the primary vehicles for our communication, it is important that we not take the components of our verbal communication for granted.

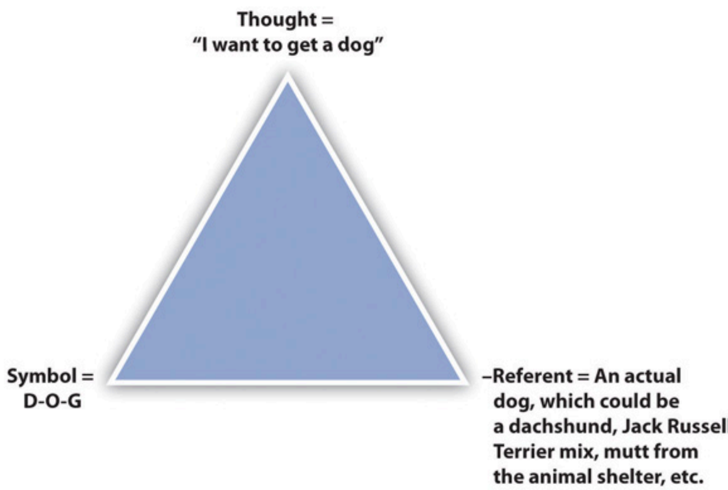
Language Is Symbolic

Our language system is primarily made up of symbols. A symbol is something that stands in for or represents something else. Symbols can be communicated verbally (speaking the word *hello*) or in writing (putting the letters H-E-L-L-O together). In any case, the symbols we use stand in for something else, like a physical object or an idea; they do not actually correspond to the thing being referenced in any direct way. Unlike hieroglyphics in ancient Egypt, which often did have a literal relationship between the written symbol and the object being referenced, the symbols used in modern languages look nothing like the object or idea to which they refer.

The triangle of meaning is a model of communication that indicates the relationship among a thought, symbol, and referent and highlights the indirect relationship between the symbol and referent (Richards & Ogden, 1923). As you can see in Figure 3.1 "Triangle of Meaning", the thought is the concept or idea a person references. The symbol is the word that represents the thought, and the referent is the object or idea to which the symbol refers. This model is useful for us as communicators because when we are aware of the indirect relationship between symbols and referents, we are aware of how common misunderstandings occur.

Consider the following example: Jasper and Abby have been thinking about getting a new dog. So each of them is having a similar thought. They are each using the same symbol, the word *dog*, to communicate their thoughts. Their referents, however, are different. Jasper is thinking about a small dog like a dachshund, and Abby is thinking about an Australian shepherd. Since the word *dog* doesn't refer to one specific object in our reality, it is possible for them to have the same thought, and use the same symbol, but end up in an awkward moment when they get to the shelter and fall in love with their respective referents only to find out the other person didn't have the same thing in mind.

Figure 3.1 Triangle of Meaning



Source: Adapted from Ivor A. Richards and Charles K. Ogden, *The Meaning of Meaning* (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Tubner, 1923).

Being aware of this indirect relationship between symbol and referent, we can try to compensate for it by getting clarification. Some of what we learned in Chapter 2 "Communication and Perception", about perception checking, can be useful here. Abby might ask Jasper, "What kind of dog do you have in mind?" This question would allow Jasper to describe his referent, which would allow for a more shared understanding. If Jasper responds, "Well, I like short-haired dogs. And we need a dog that will work well in an apartment," then there's still quite a range of referents. Abby could ask questions for clarification, like "Sounds like you're saying that a smaller dog might be better. Is that right?" Getting to a place of shared understanding can be difficult, even when we define our symbols and describe our referents.

Language is Learned

As we just learned, the relationship between the symbols that make up our language and their referents is arbitrary, which means they have no meaning until we assign it to them. In order to effectively use a language system, we have to learn, over time, which symbols go with which referents since we can't just tell by looking at the symbol. Like me, you probably learned what the word *apple* meant by looking at the letters A-P-P-L-E and a picture of an apple and having a teacher or caregiver help you sound out the letters until you said the whole word. Over time, we associated that combination of letters with the picture of the red delicious apple and no longer had to sound each letter out. This is a deliberate process that may seem slow at the moment, but as we will see next, our ability to acquire language is actually quite astounding. We didn't just learn individual words and their meanings, though; we also learned rules of grammar that help us put those words into meaningful sentences.

We learn the rules of language as we learn to speak and read.

Language Rules

Semantic Rules

First, semantic rules are the dictionary definition of the word. However, the meaning can change based on the context in which it is used. For instance, the word fly by itself does not mean anything. It makes more sense if we put the word into a context by saying things like, “There is a fly on the wall;” “I will fly to Dallas tomorrow;” “That girl is so fly;” or “The fly on your pants is open!” We would not be able to communicate with others if we did not have semantic rules.

Definitions help us narrow the meaning of particular symbols, which also narrows a symbol's possible referents. They also provide more words (symbols) for which we must determine a referent. If a concept is abstract and the words used to define it are also abstract, then a definition may be useless. Have you ever been caught in a verbal maze as you look up an unfamiliar word, only to find that the definition contains more unfamiliar words? Although this can be frustrating, definitions do serve a purpose.

However, using words is not as simple as using the dictionary definition of a word. Words have *denotative* and *connotative meanings*. Denotation refers to definitions that are accepted by the language group as a whole, or the dictionary definition of a word. For example, the denotation of the word *cowboy* is a man who takes care of cattle. Another denotation is a reckless and/or independent person (Dictonary.com). A more abstract word, like *change*, would be more difficult to understand due to the multiple denotations. Since both *cowboy* and *change* have multiple meanings, they are considered polysemic words. Monosemic words have only one use in a language, which makes their denotation more straightforward. As you might guess based on our discussion of the complexity of language so far, monosemic words are far outnumbered by polysemic words.

Connotation refers to definitions that are based on emotion- or experience-based associations people have with a word. To go back to our previous words, *change* can have positive or negative connotations depending on a person's experiences. A person who just ended a long-term relationship may think of change as good or bad depending on what he or she thought about his or her former partner. Even monosemic words like *handkerchief* that only have one denotation can have multiple connotations. A handkerchief can conjure up thoughts of dainty Southern belles or disgusting snot-rags. A polysemic word like *cowboy* has many connotations, and philosophers of language have explored how connotations extend beyond one or two experiential or emotional meanings of a word to constitute cultural myths (Barthes, 1972). *Cowboy*, for example, connects to the frontier and the western history of the United States, which has mythologies associated with it that help shape the narrative of the nation. While people who grew up with cattle or have family that ranch may have a very specific connotation of the word *cowboy* based on personal experience, other people's connotations may be more influenced by popular cultural symbolism like that seen in westerns.

Syntactic Rules

Second, syntactic rules govern how we help guide the words we use. Syntactic rules can refer to the use of grammar, structure, and punctuation to help effectively convey our ideas. For instance, we can say "Where are you" as opposed to "where you are," which can convey a different meaning and have different perceptions. The same thing can happen when you don't place a comma in the right place. The comma can make a big difference in how people understand a message.

A great example of how syntactic rules is the Star Wars character, Yoda, who often speaks with different rules. He has said, "Named must be your fear before banish it you can" and "The greatest techer, failure is." This example illustrates that syntactic rules can vary based on culture or background.

Walter Lim – https://www.allpurposeguru.com/2020/04/some-troublesome-punctuation-marks/punctuation-saves-lives/ – CC

Pragmatic Rules

Third, pragmatic rules help us interpret messages by analyzing the interaction completely. We need to consider the words used, how they are stated, our relationship with the speaker, and the objectives of our communication. For instance, the words "I want to see you now" would mean different things if the speaker was your boss versus your romantic partner. One could be a positive connotation, and another might be a negative one. The same holds true for humor. If we know that the other person understands and appreciates sarcasm, we might be more likely to engage in that behavior and perceive it differently from someone who takes every word literally.

Most pragmatic rules are based on culture and experience. For instance, the term “Netflix and chill” has been used to indicate that two people will hook up. Imagine someone from a different country who did not know what this meant; they would be shocked if they thought they were going to watch Netflix with the other person and just relax. Another example would be “Want to have a drink?”, which usually infers an alcoholic beverage. Another way of saying this might be to say, “Would you like something to drink?” The second sentence does not imply that the drink has to contain alcohol.

It is common for people to text in capital letters when they are angry or excited. You would interpret the text differently if the text was not in capital letters. For instance, “I love you” might be perceived differently from “I LOVE YOU!!!” Thus, when communicating with others, you should also realize that pragmatic rules can impact the message.

Language Shapes The Way We Think

A TED element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://open.maricopa.edu/com110/?p=81

Key Takeaways

- The triangle of meaning is a model of communication that indicates the relationship among a thought, symbol, and referent, and highlights the indirect relationship between the symbol and the referent. The model explains how for any given symbol there can be many different referents, which can lead to misunderstanding.
- *Denotation* refers to the agreed on or dictionary definition of a word. *Connotation* refers to definitions that are based on emotion- or experience-based associations people have with a word.
- The rules of language help make it learnable and

usable. Although the rules limit some of the uses of language, they still allow for the possibility of creativity and play.

Exercises

1. Apply the triangle of meaning to a recent message exchange you had in which differing referents led to misunderstanding. What could you have done to help prevent or correct the misunderstanding?
2. Think of some words that have strong connotations for you. How does your connotation differ from the denotation? How might your connotation differ from another person's?

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3.2 Functions of Language

Learning Objectives

1. Identify and discuss the four main types of linguistic expressions.
2. Discuss the power of language to express our identities, influence our thinking, create bias, affect our credibility, control others, and perform actions.
3. Discuss some of the sources of fun within language.
4. Explain how neologisms and slang contribute to the dynamic nature of language.
5. Differentiate the ways in which language can separate people and bring them together.

What utterances make up our daily verbal communication? Some of our words convey meaning, some convey emotions, and some actually produce actions. Language also provides endless opportunities for fun because of its limitless, sometimes nonsensical, and always changing nature. In this section, we will learn about the five functions of language, which show us that language is expressive, language is powerful, language is fun, language is dynamic, and language is relational.

Language Is Expressive

Verbal communication helps us meet various needs through our ability to express ourselves. In terms of instrumental needs, we use verbal communication to ask questions that provide us with specific information. We also use verbal communication to describe things, people, and ideas. Verbal communication helps us inform, persuade, and entertain others. It is also through our verbal expressions that our personal relationships are formed. At its essence, language is expressive. Verbal expressions help us communicate our observations, thoughts, feelings, and needs (McKay, Davis, & Fanning, 1995).

Expressing Observations

When we express observations, we report on the sensory information we are taking or have taken in. Eyewitness testimony is a good example of communicating observations. Witnesses are not supposed to make judgments or offer conclusions; they only communicate factual knowledge as they experienced it. For example, a witness could say, "I saw a white Mitsubishi Eclipse leaving my neighbor's house at 10:30 pm." As we learned in Chapter 2 "Communication and Perception" observation and description occur in the first step of the perception-checking process. When you are trying to make sense of an experience, expressing observations in a descriptive rather than evaluative way can lessen defensiveness, which facilitates competent communication.

Expressing Thoughts

When we express thoughts, we draw conclusions based on what we have experienced. In the perception process, this is similar to the interpretation step. We take various observations and evaluate and interpret them to assign them meaning (a conclusion). Whereas our observations are based on sensory information (what we saw, what we read, what we heard), thoughts are connected to our beliefs (what we think is true/false), attitudes (what we like and dislike), and values (what we think is right/wrong or good/bad). Jury members are expected to express thoughts based on reported observations to help reach a conclusion about someone's guilt or innocence. A juror might express the following thought: "The neighbor who saw the car leaving the night of the crime seemed credible. And the defendant seemed to have a shady past—I think he's trying to hide something." Sometimes people intentionally or unintentionally express thoughts as if they were feelings. For example, when people say, "I feel like you're too strict with your attendance policy," they aren't really expressing a feeling; they are expressing a judgment about the other person (a thought).

Expressing Feelings

When we express feelings, we communicate our emotions. Expressing feelings is a difficult part of verbal communication, because there are many social norms about how, why, when, where, and to whom we express our emotions. Norms for emotional expression also vary based on nationality and other cultural identities and characteristics such as age and gender. In terms of age, young children are typically freer to express positive and negative emotions in public. Gendered elements intersect with age as boys grow older and are socialized into a norm of emotional restraint. Although individual men vary in the degree to which they are emotionally expressive, there is still a prevailing social norm that encourages and even expects women to be more emotionally expressive than men.

Expressing feelings is often the most difficult form of verbal expression.

Lucas – emotion icon – CC BY-NC 2.0.

In order to verbally express our emotions, it is important that we develop an emotional vocabulary. The more specific we can be when we are verbally communicating our emotions, the less ambiguous our emotions will be for the person decoding our message. As we expand our emotional vocabulary, we are able to convey the intensity of the emotion we're feeling whether it is mild, moderate, or intense. For example, *happy* is mild, *delighted* is moderate, and *ecstatic* is intense; *ignored* is mild, *rejected* is moderate, and *abandoned* is intense (Hargie, 2011).

Expressing Needs

When we express needs, we are communicating in an instrumental way to help us get things done. Since we almost always know our needs more than others do, it's important for us to be able to convey those needs to others. Expressing needs can help us get a project done at work or help us navigate the changes of a long-term romantic partnership. Not expressing needs can lead to feelings of abandonment, frustration, or resentment. For example, if one romantic partner expresses the following thought "I think we're moving too quickly in our relationship" but doesn't also express a need, the other person in the relationship doesn't have a guide for what to do in response to the expressed thought. Stating, "I need to spend some time with my hometown friends this weekend. Would you mind if I went home by myself?" would likely make the expression more effective. Be cautious of letting evaluations or judgments sneak into your expressions of need. Saying "I need you to stop suffocating me!" really expresses a thought-feeling mixture more than a need.

Table 3.1 Four Types of Verbal Expressions

Type	**Description**	**Example**
Observation	Report of sensory experiences or memories	"Pauline asked me to bring this file to you."
Thought	Conclusion about or judgment of experiences and observations	"Students today have much less respect for authority."
Feeling	Communicating emotions	"I feel at peace when we're together."
Need	Stating wants or requesting help or support	"I'm saving money for summer vacation. Is it OK if we skip our regular night out this week?"

Source: Adapted from Matthew McKay, Martha Davis, and Patrick Fanning, *Messages: Communication Skills Book*, 2nd ed. (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 1995), 34–36.

Language Is Powerful

https://www.ted.com/talks/sylvia_izegbu_the_power_of_language?utm_campaign=tedspread&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=tedcomshare

Language and Identity

The power of language to express our identities varies depending on the origin of the label (self-chosen or other imposed) and the context. People are usually comfortable with the language they use to describe their own identities but may have issues with the labels others place on them. In terms of context, many people express their "Irish" identity on St. Patrick's Day, but they may not think much about it over the rest of the year. There are many examples of people who have taken a label that was imposed on them, one that usually has negative connotations, and intentionally used it in ways that counter previous meanings. Some country music singers and comedians have reclaimed the label *redneck*, using it as an identity marker they are proud of rather than a negative term. Other examples of people reclaiming identity labels are the "black is beautiful" movement that repositioned *black* as a positive identity marker for African Americans and the "queer" movement of the 1980s and '90s that reclaimed *queer* as a positive identity marker for some gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people. Even though some people embrace reclaimed words, they still carry their negative connotations and are not openly accepted by everyone.

Language and Names

New parents/guardians typically spend a great deal of time trying to pick just the right name for their newborn. We know that names can impact other people's perceptions. Our names impact how we feel and how we behave. For instance, if you heard that someone was named Stacy, you might think that person was female, nice, and friendly, and you would be surprised if that person turned out to be male, mean, and aggressive.

People with unusual names tend to have more emotional distress than those with common names. Names impact our identity because others will typically have negative perceptions of unusual names or unique spellings of names. Names can change over time and can gain acceptance. For instance, the name Madison was not even considered a female first name until the movie "Splash" in the 1980s.

Some names are very distinctive, which also makes them memorable and recognizable. Think about musical artists or celebrities with unique names. It helps you remember them, and it helps you distinguish that person from others.

Some names encompass some cultural or ethnic identity. In the popular book, Freakonomics, the authors showed a relationship between names and socioeconomic status. They discover that a popular name usually starts with high socioeconomic families, and then it becomes popular with lower socioeconomic families. Hence, it is very conceivable to determine the socioeconomic status of people you associate with based on their birth date and name. Figure 4.3.1 shows some of the more popular baby names for girls and boys, along with names that are non-binary.

Figure 4.3.1">4.3.1">4.3.1">4.3.1">4.3.1">4.3.1">4.3.1">4.3.1">4.3.1">4.3.1">4.3.1">4.3.1 4.3.1

: Popular Baby Names

Affiliation

When we want others to associate with us or have an affiliation with us, we might change the way we speak and the words we use. All of those things can impact how other people relate to us. Researchers found that when potential romantic partners employed the same word choices regarding pronouns and prepositions, then interest also increased. At the same time, couples that used similar word choices when texting each other significantly increased their relationship duration. This study implies that we often inadvertently mimic other people's use of language when we focus on what they say.

If you have been in a romantic relationship for a long period, you might create special expressions or jargon for the other person, and that specialized vocabulary can create greater closeness and understanding. The same line of thinking occurs for groups in a gang or persons in the military. If we adapt to the other person's communication style or converge, then we can also impact perceptions of affiliation. Research has shown that people who have similar speech also have more positive feelings for each other. However, speech can also work in the opposite direction when we diverge, or when we communicate in a very different fashion. For instance, a group from another culture might speak the same dialect, even though they can speak English, in order to create distance and privacy from others.

Sexism and Racism

Before discussing the concepts of sexism and racism, we must understand the term "bias." Bias is an attitude that is not objective or balanced, prejudiced, or the use of words that intentionally or unintentionally offend people or express an unfair attitude concerning a person's race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, disability, or illness. We'll explore more on the issue of biased language later in this chapter.

Sexism or bias against others based on their sex can come across in language. Sexist language can be defined as "words, phrases, and expressions that unnecessarily differentiate between females and males or exclude, trivialize, or diminish either sex."[18] Language can impact how we feel about ourselves and others. For instance, there is a magazine called *Working Mother*, but there is not one called "Working Father." Even though the reality is that many men who work also have families and are fathers, there are no words that tend to distinguish them from other working men. Whereas, women are distinguished when they both work and are mothers compared to other women who solely work and also compared to women who are solely mothers and/or wives.

Think about how language has changed over the years. We used to have occupations that were highly male-dominated in the workplace and had words to describe them. For instance, policemen, firemen, and chairmen are now police officers, firefighters, and chairpersons. The same can also be said for some female-dominated occupations. For instance, stewardess, secretary, and waitress have been changed to include males and are often called flight attendants, office assistants, and servers. Thus, to eliminate sexism, we need to be cautious of the word choices we use when talking with others. Sexist language will impact perceptions, and people might be swayed about a person's capability based on word choices.

Similarly, racism is the bias people have towards others of a different race. Racist language conveys that a racial group is superior or better than another race. Some words in English have racial connotations. Aaron Smith-McLallen, Blair T. Johnson, John Dovidio, and Adam Pearson wrote:

In the United States and many other cultures, the color white often carries more positive connotations than the color black… Terms such as "Black Monday," "Black Plague", "black cats" and the "black market" all have negative connotations, and literature, television, and movies have traditionally portrayed heroes in white and villains in black. The empirical work of John E. Williams and others throughout the 1960s demonstrated that these positive and negative associations with the colors black and white, independent of any explicit connection to race, were evident among Black and White children as young as 3 years old … as well as adults.

Currently, there is an ongoing debate in the United States about whether President Trump's use of the phrase "Chinese Virus" when referring to the coronavirus is racially insensitive. The argument for its racial insensitivity is that the President is specifically using the term as an "other" technique to allow his followers to place blame on Chinese people for the coronavirus. Unsurprisingly, as a result of the use of the phase "Chinese Virus," there have been numerous violent attacks against individuals of Asian descent within the United States. Notice that we don't say people of Chinese descent here. The people that are generally inflamed by this rhetoric don't take the time to distinguish among people they label as "other."

It is important to note that many words do not imply any type of sexual or racial connotations. However, some people might use it to make judgments or expectations of others. For example, when describing a bad learning experience, the student might say "Black professor" or "female student" as opposed to just saying the student and professor argued. These descriptors can be problematic and sometimes not even necessary in the conversation. When using those types of words, it can create slight factors of sexism/racism.

Language Affects Our Credibility

One of the goals of this chapter is to help you be more competent with your verbal communication. People make assumptions about your credibility based on how you speak and what you say. Even though we've learned that meaning is in people rather than words and that the rules that govern verbal communication, like rules of grammar, are arbitrary, these norms still mean something. You don't have to be a perfect grammarian to be perceived as credible. In fact, if you followed the grammar rules for written communication to the letter you would actually sound pretty strange since our typical way of speaking isn't as formal and structured as writing. But you still have to support your ideas and explain the conclusions you make to be seen as competent. You have to use language clearly and be accountable for what you say in order to be seen as trustworthy. Using informal language and breaking social norms wouldn't enhance your credibility during a professional job interview, but it might with your friends at a tailgate party. Politicians know that the way they speak affects their credibility, but they also know that using words that are too scientific or academic can lead people to perceive them as eggheads, which would hurt their credibility. Politicians and many others in leadership positions need to be able to use language to put people at ease, relate to others, and still appear confident and competent.

Language Is a Means of Control

Control is a word that has negative connotations, but our use of it here can be positive, neutral, or negative. Verbal communication can be used to reward and punish. We can offer verbal communication in the form of positive reinforcement to praise someone. We can withhold verbal communication or use it in a critical, aggressive, or hurtful way as a form of negative reinforcement.

Directives are utterances that try to get another person to do something. They can range from a rather polite *ask* or *request* to a more forceful *command* or *insist*. Context informs when and how we express directives and how people respond to them. Promises are often paired with directives in order to persuade people to comply, and those promises, whether implied or stated, should be kept in order to be an ethical communicator. Keep this in mind to avoid arousing false expectations on the part of the other person (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990).

Rather than verbal communication being directed at one person as a means of control, the way we talk creates overall climates of communication that may control many. Verbal communication characterized by empathy, understanding, respect, and honesty creates open climates that lead to more collaboration and more information exchange. Verbal communication that is controlling, deceitful, and vague creates a closed climate in which people are less willing to communicate and less trusting (Brown, 2006).

Language Is Performative

Some language is actually more like an action than a packet of information. Saying, "I promise," "I guarantee," or "I pledge," does more than convey meaning; it communicates intent. Such utterances are called commissives, as they mean a speaker is committed to a certain course of action (Crystal, 2005). Of course, promises can be broken, and there can be consequences, but other verbal communication is granted official power that can guarantee action. The two simple words *I do* can mean that a person has agreed to an oath before taking a witness stand or assuming the presidency. It can also mean that two people are now bound in a relationship recognized by the government and/or a religious community. These two words, if said in the right context and in front of the right person, such as a judge or a reverend, bring with them obligations that cannot be undone without additional steps and potential negative repercussions. In that sense, language is much more than "mere words."

Judges' words perform actions ranging from holding someone in contempt of court to sentencing someone to death.

Performative language can also be a means of control, especially in legal contexts. In some cases, the language that makes our laws is intentionally vague. In courts all over the nation, the written language intersects with spoken language as lawyers advocate for particular interpretations of the written law. The utterances of judges and juries set precedents for reasonable interpretations that will then help decide future cases. Imagine how powerful the words *We the jury find the defendant…* seem to the defendant awaiting his or her verdict. The sentences handed down by judges following a verdict are also performative because those words impose fines, penalties, or even death. Some language is deemed so powerful that it is regulated. Hate speech, which we will learn more about later, and slander, libel, and defamation are considered powerful enough to actually do damage to a person and have therefore been criminalized.

Language Is Fun

Word games have long been popular. Before Words with Friends, there was Apples to Apples, Boggle, Scrabble, and crossword puzzles. Writers, poets, and comedians have built careers on their ability to have fun with language and in turn share that fun with others. The fun and frivolity of language become clear as teachers get half-hearted laughs from students when they make puns, Jay Leno has a whole bit where he shows the hilarious mistakes people unintentionally make when they employ language, and people vie to construct the longest palindromic sentence (a sentence that as the same letters backward and forward).

There are more than one hundred theories of humor, but none of them quite captures the complex and often contradictory nature of what we find funny (Foot & McCreaddie, 2006). Humor is a complicated social phenomenon that is largely based on the relationship between language and meaning. Humor functions to liven up conversations, break the ice, and increase group cohesion. We also use humor to test our compatibility with others when a deep conversation about certain topics like politics or religion would be awkward. Bringing up these topics in a lighthearted way can give us indirect information about another person's beliefs, attitudes, and values. Based on their response to the humorous message, we can either probe further or change the subject and write it off as a poor attempt at humor (Foot & McCreaddie, 2006). Using humor also draws attention to us, and the reactions that we get from others feeds into our self-concept. We also use humor to disclose information about ourselves that we might not feel comfortable revealing in a more straightforward way. Humor can also be used to express sexual interest or to cope with bad news or bad situations.

We first start to develop an understanding of humor as children when we realize that the words we use for objects are really arbitrary and can be manipulated. This manipulation creates a distortion or incongruous moment in the reality that we had previously known. Some humor scholars believe that this early word play—for example, calling a horse a turtle and a turtle a horse—leads us to appreciate language-based humor like puns and riddles (Foot & McCreaddie, 2006). It is in the process of encoding and decoding that humor emerges. People use encoding to decide how and when to use humor, and people use decoding to make sense of humorous communication. Things can go wrong in both of those processes. I'm sure we can all relate to the experience of witnessing a poorly timed or executed joke (a problem with encoding) and of not getting a joke (a problem with decoding).

Comedians make a living by making language fun, but humor is contextual and not always easy to pull off.

Language is Dynamic

As we already learned, language is essentially limitless and ever changing. We may create a one-of-a-kind sentence combining words in new ways and never know it. Aside from the endless structural possibilities, words change meaning, and new words are created daily.

Neologisms

Neologisms are newly coined or used words. Newly coined words are those that were just brought into linguistic existence. Newly used words make their way into languages in several ways, including borrowing and changing structure. *Taking* is actually a more fitting descriptor than *borrowing*, since we take words but don't really give them back. In any case, borrowing is the primary means through which languages expand. English is a good case in point, as most of its vocabulary is borrowed and doesn't reflect the language's Germanic origins. English has been called the "vacuum cleaner of languages" (Crystal, 2005). We have borrowed many words, like *chic* from French, *karaoke* from Japanese, and *caravan* from Arabic.

Structural changes also lead to new words. Compound words are neologisms that are created by joining two already known words. *Keyboard*, *newspaper*, and *giftcard* are all compound words that were formed when new things were created or conceived. We also create new words by adding something, subtracting something, or blending them together. For example, we can add affixes, meaning a prefix or a suffix, to a word. Affixing usually alters the original meaning but doesn't completely change it. *Ex-husband* and *kitchenette* are relatively recent examples of such changes (Crystal, 2005). New words are also formed when clipping a word like *examination*, which creates a new word, *exam*, that retains the same meaning. And last, we can form new words by blending old ones together. Words like *breakfast* and *lunch* blend letters and meaning to form a new word—*brunch*.

Existing words also change in their use and meaning. The digital age has given rise to some interesting changes in word usage. Before Facebook, the word *friend* had many meanings, but it was mostly used as a noun referring to a companion. The sentence, *I'll friend you*, wouldn't have made sense to many people just a few years ago because *friend* wasn't used as a verb. *Google* went from being a proper noun referring to the company to a more general verb that refers to searching for something on the Internet (perhaps not even using the Google search engine). Meanings can expand or contract without changing from a noun to a verb. *Gay*, an adjective for feeling happy, expanded to include *gay* as an adjective describing a person's sexual orientation. Perhaps because of the confusion that this caused, the meaning of *gay* has contracted again, as the earlier meaning is now considered archaic, meaning it is no longer in common usage.

The American Dialect Society names an overall "Word of the Year" each year and selects winners in several more specific categories. The winning words are usually new words or words that recently took on new meaning.

"All of the Words of the Year 1990 to Present," American Dialect Society, accessed June 7, 2012, http://www.americandialect.org/woty/all-of-the-words-of-the- year-1990-to-present

Slang

Slang is a great example of the dynamic nature of language. Slang refers to new or adapted words that are specific to a group, context, and/or time period; regarded as less formal; and representative of people's creative play with language. Research has shown that only about 10 percent of the slang terms that emerge over a fifteen-year period survive. Many more take their place though, as new slang words are created using inversion, reduction, or old-fashioned creativity (Allan & Burridge, 2006). Inversion is a form of word play that produces slang words like *sick*, *wicked*, and *bad* that refer to the opposite of their typical meaning. Reduction creates slang words such as *pic*, *sec*, and *later* from *picture*, *second*, and *see you later*. New slang words often represent what is edgy, current, or simply relevant to the daily lives of a group of people. Many creative examples of slang refer to illegal or socially taboo topics like sex, drinking, and drugs. It makes sense that developing an alternative way to identify drugs or talk about taboo topics could make life easier for the people who partake in such activities. Slang allows people who are in "in the know" to break the code and presents a linguistic barrier for unwanted outsiders. Taking a moment to think about the amount of slang that refers to being intoxicated on drugs or alcohol or engaging in sexual activity should generate a lengthy list.

It's difficult for some to identify the slang they use at any given moment because it is worked into everyday language patterns and becomes very natural. Just as we learned here, new words can create a lot of buzz and become a part of common usage very quickly. The same can happen with new slang terms. Most slang words also disappear quickly, and their alternative meaning fades into obscurity. For example, you don't hear anyone using the word *macaroni* to refer to something cool or fashionable. But that's exactly what the common slang meaning of the word was at the time the song "Yankee Doodle" was written. Yankee Doodle isn't saying the feather he sticks in his cap is a small, curved pasta shell; he is saying it's cool or stylish.

Colloquialisms

Colloquialisms are the use of informal words in communication.

Colloquialism varies from region to region. Examples might be "wanna" instead of "want to" or "gonna" instead of "going to." It shows us how a society uses language in their everyday lives. Here's a short list of some common colloquialisms you may have heard:

- Bamboozle – to deceive
- Be blue – to be sad
- Beat around the bush – to avoid a specific topic
- Buzz off – go away
- Fell through the cracks – to be neglected
- Go bananas, or go nuts – go insane or be very angry
- Gobsmacked – shocked
- Gonna – going to
- Hit a writer's block – unable to write
- Hit the hay – to go to sleep
- Pop into my head – to have a new thought
- Sticktoitiveness – to be persistent
- Threw me for a loop – to be surprised
- Throw someone under the bus – to throw the blame on another person
- Wanna – want to
- Y'all – you all
- Yinz – you all

Idioms

Idioms are expressions or figures of speech whose meaning cannot be understood by looking at the individual words and interpreting them literally. Idioms can help amplify messages. Idioms can be used to provide artistic expression. For instance, "knowledge is power!"

Idioms can be hard to grasp for non-native speakers. As such, many instructors in the English as a Second Language world spend a good deal of time trying to explain idioms to non-native speakers. Table 4.4.2 presents a wide array of different idioms.

ish	About. I'll meet you at 4ish.
a basket case	A wreck. He was a basket case after he
a breath of fresh air	Refreshing/fun. She's a breath of fresh
a change of heart	Change my mind. I've had a change of
a blessing in disguise	Something bad that turns out good. Lo
a dead end	That's a dead end job–time to find a ne
a gut feeling	Feeling in my stomach. I have a gut fee
a matter of opinion	It's a matter of opinion whether eating
a piece of cake	That test was a snap–it was a piece of
a ripoff	You spent $500 for a watermelon! Wha
a pain in the neck	A pest. His little brother is a real pain i
be in hot water	Be in trouble. If you tell your boss off, y
in the same boat	We're in the same situation. We're all in
on the same wavelength	We have the same ideas and opinions.
be on the ball	Very sharp. Very smart. He's really on t
it's only a matter of time	Very soon. It's only a matter of time un
be that as it may	As things stand. Be that as it may, I thi
up in arms	Really angry. His father was up in arms
up in the air	Not sure. Plans are up in the air–we ha
bend over backwards	Go out of your way. She really bent ove
Big deal!	Not important (sarcastic). Losing an ol
cost an arm and a leg	Very expensive. His new Ferrari cost a
cross your fingers	For good luck. Cross your fingers that
draw a blank	I can't remember. I drew a blank when
Easier said than done	More difficult than it seems.
Am fed up with	Sick and tired of something. I'm fed up
from scratch	Make from basic ingredients. Her carr
for the time being	For now. For the time being, everythin
get cold feet	Feel too scared to do something. John

get out of the wrong side of the bed	In a bad mood. He must have gotten up
get the picture	Understand. Do you get the picture?
get your act together	Get organized/stop wasting time. You
give it a shot	Try. Why not try bungee jumping. Give
give him a piece of your mind	Get angry and tell someone off. If I wer
give him the cold shoulder	Ignore someone. Brett walked right pa
go all out	Do your utmost for someone or somet
go downhill	Get worse. After he got divorced, every
go up in smoke	Evaporate/disappear. His dreams of be
have a chip on your shoulder	I think you are great. He has such a chi
had it up to here	Can't take any more. I've had it up to h
mixed feelings	Positive and negative feelings together
second thoughts	Thinking again about a decision. I'm ha
throw a fit	Get really angry. His mother threw a fi
I'm all ears	To listen intently. Tell me about your w
in the bag	Certain. His new job is in the bag. He s
in the middle of nowhere	Way out in the country. Their ski chale
Just my luck!	Bad luck. Just my luck to lose the winn
keep an eye on	Watch carefully. Will you keep an eye o
bear in mind	Keep it in mind. Bear in mind, learning
learn by heart	Memorize. You have to learn irregular
let the cat out of the bag	Spill the beans. Tell a secret. Don't let t
make my day	Make my day great. The guy I have a cr
miss the point	Don't understand the basic meaning. Y
no way	Impossible. You got all A's on your exan
don't have a clue	I have no idea. I don't have a clue what
don't have the faintest idea	Don't understand. I don't have the faint
off the top of my head	Without thinking. Off the top of my he
on the dot	Ontime. He arrived at 6 o'clock on the

out of sight, out of mind	You forget someone you don't see anyr
out of the blue	Suddenly. Guess who called me out of
play it by ear	Make no plans–do things spontaneous
pull someone's leg	Kid someone. Stop pulling my leg. I kn
red tape	Bureaucracy. It's almost impossible to
read between the lines	Understand what is not stated. If you r
safe and sound	Fine. The Boy Scouts returned safe and
see eye to eye	Agree. He doesn't see eye to eye with h
sour grapes	Pretend to not want something that yo
slipped my mind	Forgot. I meant to call you last night, b
small talk	Chitchat. It's important to be able to m
talk shop	Talk about work. What a boring evenin
the icing on the cake	Something that makes a good thing gre
the last straw	The thing that ruins everything. When
time flies	Time goes fast. Time flies when you ar
you can say that again	You agree emphatically. Kanye West is
you name it	Everything you can think of. This camp
wouldn't be caught dead	Not even dead would I do something. I
she's a doll	Someone really great. Thanks for helpi
full of beans	Lively–usually for a child. Little childre
full of baloney	Not true. She's full of baloney–she doe
like two peas in a pod	Very similar. His two brothers are like
a piece of cake	Very easy. My math test was so easy–a
sounds fishy	Suspicious. Doubling your money in ar
a frog in my throat	I can't speak clearly. Ahem! Sorry I had
smell a rat	Something is suspicious. The policema
go to the dogs	Go downhill. Everything is going to the
cat got your tongue	Silent for no reason. What's the matter
for the birds	Awful. How was the new Batman movie

pay through the nose	Pay lots of money. They paid through t
tongue in cheek	Being ironic. I meant that tongue in ch
all thumbs	Clumsy. He couldn't put that simple tal
get off my back	Leave me alone. Bug off! Get off my ba
drive me up a wall	Drive me crazy. Rude people drive me
spill the beans	Tell a secret. Hey, don't spill the beans.
hit the ceiling	Blow up. His dad hit the ceiling when h
go fly a kite	Get lost! Oh, leave me alone! Go fly a k
dressed to kill	Dressed in fancy clothes. Cinderella wa
in stitches	Laughing a lot. We were all in stitches
feel like a million dollars	Feel great. I just slept for 15 hours–I fee
at the end of my rope	Can't stand it anymore. The mother of
my head is killing me	Something hurts. My head is killing me
that's out of the question	Impossible. Me? Stand up and sing and
I'm beat	Very tired.
It'll knock your socks off!	Thrills you. You'll love this summer's ac
beats me	Don't know. What's the capital of Oute
hands down	No comparison. Hands down Mykonos
goody-goody	Behaves perfectly. I can't stand Matilda
pain in the neck	A big problem. Washing dishes is a pain
like pulling teeth	Very difficult. Trying to get 2-year-old
for crying out loud	Oh no! For crying out loud–let me finis
I'm at my wit's end	I'm desperate. I'm at my wit's end tryin
like beating a dead horse	A waste of time. Trying to get my fathe
out of this world	Fantastic! My vacation to Hawaii was o
cost an arm and a leg	Very expensive. A Rolls Royce costs an
go figure	Try to guess why. Our English teacher
in the nick of time	Just in time. The hero arrived in the ni
I'm up to my eyeballs in	Very busy. I'm up to my eyeballs in wor

I had a blast/a ball	A great time. I had a blast/ball at Sand
win-win situation	Both sides win. Selling their old stock c
I'm swamped	Very busy. Let's get together next weel
It's a steal	Fantastic bargain. Getting a new comp
the sticks	Way out in the country. Who would wa
break the ice	Start a conversation. Talking about the
give me a break	Leave me alone! Come on! Give me a b
like talking to the wall	A waste of time. Dealing with many tee
see eye to eye	Agree. I hardly ever see eye to eye with
It's about time	It's time. It's about time you started yo
pays peanuts	Pays hardly anything. This job pays pea
sleep like a log	Sleep soundly. Last night I slept like a l
ace	Do great. I aced the math test. I got 10
easy as pie	Super easy. The English test was as eas
blabbermouth	Someone who tells secrets. Don't tell S
don't bug me	Don't bother me. Don't bug me–I'm bus
by the skin of my teeth	Barely manage something. I passed the
can't make head nor tail of	I can't understand. I can't make head n
cool as a cucumber	Very calm. The policeman was cool as a

Clichés

Cliché is an idea or expression that has been so overused that it has lost its original meaning.[28] Clichés are common and can often be heard. For instance, "light as a feather" or "happily ever after" are common clichés. They are important because they express ideas and thoughts that are popular in everyday use. They are prevalent in advertisements, television, and literature.

"Getting Plugged In"

Is "Textese" Hurting Our Verbal Communication?

Textese, also called text-message-ese and txt talk, among other things, has been called a "new dialect" of English that mixes letters and numbers, abbreviates words, and drops vowels and punctuation to create concise words and statements. Although this "dialect" has primarily been relegated to the screens of smartphones and other text-capable devices, it has slowly been creeping into our spoken language (Huang, 2011). Some critics say textese is "destroying" language by "pillaging punctuation" and "savaging our sentences" (Humphrys, 2007). A relatively straightforward *tks* for "thanks" or *u* for "you" has now given way to textese sentences like *IMHO U R GR8*. If you translated that into "In my humble opinion, you are great," then you are fluent in textese. Although teachers and parents seem convinced that this type of communicating will eventually turn our language into emoticons and abbreviations, some scholars aren't. David Crystal, a well-known language expert, says that such changes to the English language aren't new and that texting can actually have positive effects. He points out that Shakespeare also abbreviated many words, played with the rules of language, and made up several thousand words, and he is not considered an abuser of language. He also cites research that found, using experimental data, that children who texted more scored higher on reading and vocabulary tests.

Crystal points out that in order to play with language, you must first have some understanding of the rules of language (Huang, 2011).

1. What effects, if any, do you think textese has had on your non-text-message communication?
2. Overall do you think textese and other forms of computer-mediated communication have affected our communication? Try to identify one potential positive and negative influence that textese has had on our verbal communication.

Language Is Relational

We use verbal communication to initiate, maintain, and terminate our interpersonal relationships. The first few exchanges with a potential romantic partner or friend help us size the other person up and figure out if we want to pursue a relationship or not. We then use verbal communication to remind others how we feel about them and to check in with them—engaging in relationship maintenance through language use. When negative feelings arrive and persist, or for many other reasons, we often use verbal communication to end a relationship.

Language Can Bring Us Together

Interpersonally, verbal communication is key to bringing people together and maintaining relationships. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, our use of words like *I*, *you*, *we*, *our*, and *us* affect our relationships. "We language" includes the words *we*, *our*, and *us* and can be used to promote a feeling of inclusiveness. "I language" can be useful when expressing thoughts, needs, and feelings because it leads us to "own" our expressions and avoid the tendency to mistakenly attribute the cause of our thoughts, needs, and feelings to others. Communicating emotions using "I language" may also facilitate emotion sharing by not making our conversational partner feel at fault or defensive. For example, instead of saying, "You're making me crazy!" you could say, "I'm starting to feel really anxious because we can't make a decision about this." Conversely, "you language" can lead people to become defensive and feel attacked, which could be divisive and result in feelings of interpersonal separation.

Verbal communication brings people together and helps maintain satisfying relationships.

Aside from the specific words that we use, the frequency of communication impacts relationships. Of course, the content of what is said is important, but research shows that romantic partners who communicate frequently with each other and with mutual friends and family members experience less stress and uncertainty in their relationship and are more likely to stay together (McCornack, 2007). When frequent communication combines with supportive messages, which are messages communicated in an open, honest, and nonconfrontational way, people are sure to come together.

Moving from the interpersonal to the sociocultural level, we can see that speaking the same language can bring people together. When a person is surrounded by people who do not speak his or her native language, it can be very comforting to run into another person who speaks the same language. Even if the two people are strangers, the ease of linguistic compatibility is comforting and can quickly facilitate a social bond. We've already learned that language helps shape our social reality, so a common language leads to some similar perspectives. Of course, there are individual differences within a language community, but the power of shared language to unite people has led to universal language movements that advocate for one global language.

Euphemisms

Euphemisms also make language unclear. People use euphemisms as a means of saying something more politely or less bluntly. For instance, instead of telling your parents/guardians that you failed a test, you might say that you did sub-optimal. People use euphemisms because it sounds better, and it seems like a better way to express how they feel. People use euphemisms all the time. For instance, instead of saying this person died, they might say the person passed away. Instead of saying that someone farted, you might say someone passed gas.

Relative Language

Relative language depends on the person communicating. People's backgrounds vary. Hence, their perspectives will vary. I know a college professor that complains about her salary. However, other college professors would love to have a salary like hers. In other words, our language is based on our perception of our experiences. For instance, if someone asked you what would be your ideal salary, would it be based on your previous salary? Your parents? Your friends? Language is relative because of that reason. If I said, "Let's go eat at an expensive restaurant," what would be expensive for you? For some person, it would be $50, for another, $20, for someone else it might be $10, and yet there might be someone who would say $5 is expensive!

Language Can Separate Us

Whether it's criticism, teasing, or language differences, verbal communication can also lead to feelings of separation. Language differences alone do not present insurmountable barriers. We can learn other languages with time and effort, there are other people who can translate and serve as bridges across languages, and we can also communicate quite a lot nonverbally in the absence of linguistic compatibility. People who speak the same language can intentionally use language to separate. The words *us* and *them* can be a powerful start to separation. Think of how language played a role in segregation in the United States as the notion of "separate but equal" was upheld by the Supreme Court and how apartheid affected South Africa as limits, based on finances and education, were placed on the black majority's rights to vote. Symbols, both words and images, were a very important part of Hitler's rise to power in the 1930s and '40s in Europe. Various combinations of colored stars, triangles, letters, and other symbols were sewn onto the clothing or uniforms of people persecuted by the Nazis in order to classify them. People were labeled and reduced to certain characteristics rather than seen as complete humans, which facilitated the Nazis' oppression, violence, and killing (Holocaust and Human Rights Education Center, 2012).

At the interpersonal level, unsupportive messages can make others respond defensively, which can lead to feelings of separation and actual separation or dissolution of a relationship. It's impossible to be supportive in our communication all the time, but consistently unsupportive messages can hurt others' self-esteem, escalate conflict, and lead to defensiveness. People who regularly use unsupportive messages may create a toxic win/lose climate in a relationship. Six verbal tactics that can lead to feelings of defensiveness and separation are global labels, sarcasm, dragging up the past, negative comparisons, judgmental "you" messages, and threats (McKay, Davis & Fanning, 1995).

Common Types of Unsupportive Messages

1. **Global labels.** "You're a liar." Labeling someone irresponsible, untrustworthy, selfish, or lazy calls his or her whole identity as a person into question. Such sweeping judgments and generalizations are sure to only escalate a negative situation.
2. **Sarcasm.** "No, you didn't miss anything in class on Wednesday. We just sat here and looked at each other." Even though sarcasm is often disguised as humor, it usually represents passive-aggressive behavior through which a person indirectly communicates negative feelings.
3. **Dragging up the past.** "I should have known not to trust you when you never paid me back that $100 I let you borrow." Bringing up negative past experiences is a tactic used by people when they don't want to discuss a current situation. Sometimes people have built up negative feelings that are suddenly let out by a seemingly small thing in the moment.
4. **Negative comparisons.** "Jade graduated from college without any credit card debt. I guess you're just not as responsible as

her." Holding a person up to the supposed standards or characteristics of another person can lead to feelings of inferiority and resentment. Parents and teachers may unfairly compare children to their siblings.

5. **Judgmental "you" messages.** "You're never going to be able to hold down a job." Accusatory messages are usually generalized overstatements about another person that go beyond labeling but still do not describe specific behavior in a productive way.
6. **Threats.** "If you don't stop texting back and forth with your ex, both of you are going to regret it." Threatening someone with violence or some other negative consequence usually signals the end of productive communication. Aside from the potential legal consequences, threats usually overcompensate for a person's insecurity.

Key Takeaways

- Language helps us express observations (reports on sensory information), thoughts (conclusions and judgments based on observations or ideas), feelings, and needs.
- Language is powerful in that it expresses our identities through labels used by and on us, affects our credibility based on how we support our ideas, serves as a means of control, and performs actions when spoken by certain people in certain contexts.
- The productivity and limitlessness of language creates the possibility for countless word games and humorous uses of language.

- Language is dynamic, meaning it is always changing through the addition of neologisms, new words or old words with new meaning, and the creation of slang.
- Language is relational and can be used to bring people together through a shared reality but can separate people through unsupportive and divisive messages.

Exercises

1. Based on what you are doing and how you are feeling at this moment, write one of each of the four types of expressions—an observation, a thought, a feeling, and a need.
2. Getting integrated: A key function of verbal communication is expressing our identities. Identify labels or other words that are important for your identity in each of the following contexts: academic, professional, personal, and civic. (Examples include *honors student* for academic, *trainee* for professional, *girlfriend* for personal, and *independent* for civic.)
3. Review the types of unsupportive messages discussed earlier. Which of them do you think has the potential to separate people the most? Why? Which one do you have the most difficulty avoiding (directing toward others)? Why?

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3.3 Language, Society, and Culture

Learning Objectives

1. Discuss some of the social norms that guide conversational interaction.
2. Identify some of the ways in which language varies based on cultural context.
3. Explain the role that accommodation and code-switching play in communication.
4. Discuss cultural bias in relation to specific cultural identities.

Society and culture influence the words that we speak, and the words that we speak influence society and culture. Such a cyclical relationship can be difficult to understand, but many of the examples throughout this chapter and examples from our own lives help illustrate this point. One of the best ways to learn about society, culture, and language is to seek out opportunities to go beyond our typical comfort zones. Studying abroad, for example, brings many challenges that can turn into valuable lessons.

Language and Social Context

We arrive at meaning through conversational interaction, which follows many social norms and rules. Rules are explicitly stated conventions ("Look at me when I'm talking to you.") and norms are implicit (saying you've got to leave before you actually do to politely initiate the end to a conversation). To help conversations function meaningfully, we have learned social norms and internalized them to such an extent that we do not often consciously enact them. Instead, we rely on routines and roles (as determined by social forces) to help us proceed with verbal interaction, which also helps determine how a conversation will unfold. Our various social roles influence meaning and how we speak. For example, a person may say, "As a longtime member of this community…" or "As a first-generation college student…" Such statements cue others into the personal and social context from which we are speaking, which helps them better interpret our meaning.

One social norm that structures our communication is turn taking. People need to feel like they are contributing something to an interaction, so turn taking is a central part of how conversations play out (Crystal, 2005). Although we sometimes talk at the same time as others or interrupt them, there are numerous verbal and nonverbal cues, almost like a dance, that are exchanged between speakers that let people know when their turn will begin or end. Conversations do not always neatly progress from beginning to end with shared understanding along the way. There is a back and forth that is often verbally managed through rephrasing ("Let me try that again,") and clarification ("Does that make sense?") (Crystal, 2005)

We also have certain units of speech that facilitate turn taking. *Adjacency pairs* are related communication structures that come one after the other (adjacent to each other) in an interaction (Crystal, 2005). For example, questions are followed by answers, greetings are followed by responses, compliments are followed by a thank you, and informative comments are followed by an acknowledgment. These are the skeletal components that make up our verbal interactions, and they are largely social in that they facilitate our interactions. When these sequences don't work out, confusion, miscommunication, or frustration may result.

Some conversational elements are highly scripted or ritualized, especially the beginning and end of an exchange and topic changes (Crystal, 2005). Conversations often begin with a standard greeting and then proceed to "safe" exchanges about things in the immediate field of experience of the communicators (a comment on the weather or noting something going on in the scene). At this point, once the ice is broken, people can move on to other more content-specific exchanges. Once conversing, before we can initiate a topic change, it is a social norm that we let the current topic being discussed play itself out or continue until the person who introduced the topic seems satisfied. We then usually try to find a relevant tie-in or segue that acknowledges the previous topic, in turn acknowledging the speaker, before actually moving on. Changing the topic without following such social conventions might indicate to the other person that you were not listening or are simply rude.

Social norms influence how conversations start and end and how speakers take turns to keep the conversation going.

Felipe Cabrera – conversation – CC BY 2.0.

Ending a conversation is similarly complex. I'm sure we've all been in a situation where we are "trapped" in a conversation that we need or want to get out of. Just walking away or ending a conversation without engaging in socially acceptable "leave-taking behaviors" would be considered a breach of social norms. Topic changes are often places where people can leave a conversation, but it is still routine for us to give a special reason for leaving, often in an apologetic tone (whether we mean it or not). Generally though, conversations come to an end through the cooperation of both people, as they offer and recognize typical signals that a topic area has been satisfactorily covered or that one or both people need to leave. It is customary in the United States for people to say they have to leave before they actually do and for that statement to be dismissed or ignored by the other person until additional leave-taking behaviors are enacted. When such cooperation is lacking, an awkward silence or abrupt ending can result, and as we've already learned, US Americans are not big fans of silence. Silence is not viewed the same way in other cultures, which leads us to our discussion of cultural context.

In the typical language learning environment, it is not possible to expose learners to all the varieties of language use they might encounter. However, it certainly is possible to increase learners' awareness of socio-cultural issues. One of those is the existence of *language registers*, the idea that we adjust the language we use – in terms of formality, tone, and even vocabulary – in response to the context in which we find ourselves. Learners need to be aware of how language use could be adjusted in formal face-to-face settings, as in a work environment, to highly informal, online settings, such as Facebook postings. This involves looking beyond grammatical correctness to language in use. *Pragmatics*, another field of interest in sociolinguistics, deals with the nature of language as it occurs in actual social use. The meaning of what is said in conversation may be quite different from the literal meaning of the words used.

A statement made in an ironic, sarcastic, or humorous tone may, in fact, have a meaning diametrically opposed to its surface meaning. Answering "oh, sure" in American English to a statement or question can be a positive affirmation or be intended to ridicule what the interlocutor has said. Such nuances are important for being able to function in the target culture. This kind of sociocultural competence is not easy to acquire, as pragmatics does not involve learning a fixed set of rules. Rather, inference and intuition play a major role, as can emotions as well. Being aware of the dynamics of language use in conversation can help one be a better informed and literate speaker of any language. Pragmatic competence is particularly important in online exchanges, in which the non-verbal cues signaling intent and attitude are not available

Language and Cultural Context

Culture isn't solely determined by a person's native language or nationality. It's true that languages vary by country and region and that the language we speak influences our realities, but even people who speak the same language experience cultural differences because of their various intersecting cultural identities and personal experiences.

The actual language we speak plays an important role in shaping our reality. Comparing languages, we can see differences in how we are able to talk about the world. In English, we have the words *grandfather* and *grandmother*, but no single word distinguishing between a maternal grandfather and a paternal grandfather. But in Swedish, there's a specific word for each grandparent: *morfar* is mother's father, *farfar* is father's father, *farmor* is father's mother, and *mormor* is mother's mother (Crystal, 2005). In this example, we can see that the words available to us, based on the language we speak, influence how we talk about the world due to differences in and limitations of vocabulary.

The notion that language shapes our view of reality and our cultural patterns is best represented by the *Sapir-Whorf hypothesis*. The link between language and culture was famously described in the work of Benjamin Whorf and Edward Sapir. The *Sapir-Whorf hypothesis* postulates that your native language has a profound influence on how you see the world, that you perceive reality in the context of the language you have available to describe it. According to Sapir (1929), "The 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached" (p. 162). From this perspective, all language use – from the words we use to describe objects to the way sentences are structured – is tied closely to the culture in which it is spoken.

Whorf studied native American languages such as Hopi and was struck by differences to English which pointed to different ways of viewing the world, for example, in how time is expressed. Taken to its extreme, this kind of linguistic determinism would prevent native speakers of different languages from having the same thoughts or sharing a worldview. They would be, in a sense, captives of their native language, unable to gain different perspectives on reality.

More widely accepted today is the concept of linguistic relativity, meaning that language shapes our views of the world but is not an absolute determiner of how or what we think. *Linguistic relativity* suggests that language influences thought in worldviews, and therefore differences among languages cause differences in the thoughts of their speakers. Linguist Steven Pinker's (2007) research has shown that in fact, language is not the only existing means of thought. It is possible for us to picture reality through mental images or shapes. In recent years, there have been a number of studies on the perception of colors related to available color words. Languages differ in this area. Some, for example, do not have separate words for blue and green. In the Tarahumara indigenous language of Mexico, one single word, siyoname, is used for both colors (Kay & Kempton, 1984). Such studies, as well as similar examinations of concepts such as numbers, shapes, generally have shown that "language has some effect on perception, but it does not define perception." (Hua, 2014, p. 178). In fact, experiments have shown that in some cases, where specific terms for colors do not exist, that does not prevent color recognition: "although the Dani, a New Guinea tribe, use only two color terms . . . it was found that they could recognize and distinguish between subtle shades of colors that their language had no names for (e.g. pale blue vs. turquoise)" (Holmes, 2001, p. 324). This is in line with current linguistic thought that there is a more complex, reciprocal relationship between language and culture.

Figure 3.1.3 : Tarahumara women, Mexico

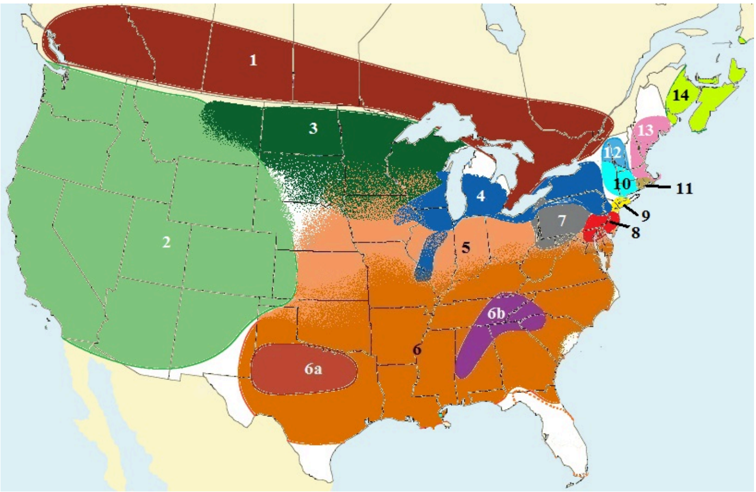
Culturally influenced differences in language and meaning can lead to some interesting encounters, ranging from awkward to informative to disastrous. In terms of awkwardness, you have likely heard stories of companies that failed to exhibit communication competence in their naming and/or advertising of products in another language. For example, in Taiwan, Pepsi used the slogan "Come Alive with Pepsi" only to later find out that when translated it meant, "Pepsi brings your ancestors back from the dead" (Kwintessential Limited, 2012). Similarly, American Motors introduced a new car called the Matador to the Puerto Rico market only to learn that *Matador* means "killer," which wasn't very comforting to potential buyers (Kwintessential, 2012). At a more informative level, the words we use to give positive reinforcement are culturally relative. In the United States and England, parents may positively and negatively reinforce their child's behavior by saying, "Good kid." There isn't an equivalent for such a phrase in other European languages, so the usage in only these two countries has been traced back to the puritan influence on beliefs about good and bad behavior (Wierzbicka, 2004). In terms of disastrous consequences, one of the most publicized and deadliest cross-cultural business mistakes occurred in India in 1984. Union Carbide, an American company, controlled a plant used to make pesticides. The company underestimated the amount of cross-cultural training that would be needed to allow the local workers, many of whom were not familiar with the technology or language/jargon used in the instructions for plant operations to do their jobs. This lack of competent communication led to a gas leak that immediately killed more than two thousand people and over time led to more than five hundred thousand injuries (Varma, 2012).

In recent years there has been a growing recognition that culture and language cannot be separated and that culture permeates all aspects of language. (Godwin-Jones, 2016). If, for example, a language has different personal pronouns for direct address, such as the informal tu in French and the formal vous, both meaning 'you', that distinction is a reflection of one aspect of the culture. It indicates that there is a built-in awareness and significance to social differentiation and that a more formal level of language use is available. Native speakers of English may have difficulty in learning how to use the different forms of address in French, or as they exist in other languages such as German or Spanish. Speakers of

American English, in particular, are inclined towards informal modes of address, moving to a first-name basis as soon as possible. Using informal addresses inappropriately can cause considerable social friction. It takes a good deal of language socialization to acquire this kind of pragmatic ability, that is to say, sufficient exposure to the forms being used correctly. In cultures where these distinctions exist, they provide a valuable device for maintaining social distance when desired, for clearly distinguishing friends from acquaintances, and for preserving social harmony in institutional settings.

Accents and Dialects

The documentary *American Tongues*, although dated at this point, is still a fascinating look at the rich tapestry of accents and dialects that makes up American English. *Dialects* are versions of languages that have distinct words, grammar, and pronunciation. *Accents* are distinct styles of pronunciation (Lustig & Koester, 2006). There can be multiple accents within one dialect. For example, people in the Appalachian Mountains of the eastern United States speak a dialect of American English that is characterized by remnants of the linguistic styles of Europeans who settled the area a couple of hundred years earlier. Even though they speak a similar dialect, a person in Kentucky could still have an accent that is distinguishable from a person in western North Carolina.



American English has several dialects that vary based on region, class, and ancestry.

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Dialects and accents can vary by region, class, or ancestry, and they influence the impressions that we make of others. Research shows that people tend to think more positively about others who speak with a dialect similar to their own and think more negatively about people who speak differently. Of course, many people think they speak normally and perceive others to have an accent or dialect. Although dialects include the use of different words and phrases, it's the tone of voice that often creates the strongest impression. For example, a person who speaks with a Southern accent may perceive a New Englander's accent to be grating, harsh, or rude because the pitch is more nasal and the rate faster. Conversely, a New Englander may perceive a Southerner's accent to be syrupy and slow, leading to an impression that the person speaking is uneducated.

Customs and Norms

Social norms are culturally relative. The words used in politeness rituals in one culture can mean something completely different in another. For example, *thank you* in American English acknowledges receiving something (a gift, a favor, a compliment), in British English it can mean "yes" similar to American English's *yes*, *please*, and in French *merci* can mean "no" as in "no, thank you" (Crystal, 2005). Additionally, what is considered a powerful language style varies from culture to culture? Confrontational language, such as swearing, can be seen as powerful in Western cultures, even though it violates some language taboos, but would be seen as immature and weak in Japan (Wetzel, 1988).

Communication style refers to both verbal and nonverbal communication along with language. Problems sometimes arise when people from different cultures try to communicate, and they "fail to recognize the conventionality of the communicative code of the other, instead taking the communicative behavior as representing what it means in their own native culture" (Loveday, 1986). An understanding of communication style differences helps listeners understand how to interpret verbal messages.

- **High Context** cultures, such as China, Japan, and South Korea, are those in which people assume that others within their culture will share their viewpoints and thus understand situations in much the same way. Consequently, people in such cultures often talk indirectly, using hints or suggestions to convey meaning with the thought that others will know what is being expressed. In *high context* cultures, what is not said is just as important, if not more important, than what is said. *High context* cultures are very often collectivistic as well.
- **Low context** cultures on the other hand are those in which people do NOT presume that others share their beliefs, values, and behaviors so they tend to be more verbally informative and

direct in their communication (Hall & Hall, 1987). Many *low context* cultures are individualist so people openly express their views, and tend to make important information obvious to others.

- **Direct** styles are those in which verbal messages reveal the speaker's true intentions, needs, wants, and desires. The focus is on accomplishing a task. The message is clear, and to the point without hidden intentions or implied meanings. The communication tends to be impersonal. Conflict is discussed openly and people say what they think. In the United States, business correspondence is expected to be short and to the point. "What can I do for you?" is a common question when a business person receives a call from a stranger; it is an accepted way of asking the caller to state his or her business.
- **Indirect** styles are those in which communication is often designed to hide or minimize the speaker's true intentions, needs, wants, and desires. Communication tends to be personal and focuses on the relationship between the speakers. The language may be subtle, and the speaker may be looking for a "softer" way to communicate there is a problem by providing many contextual cues. A hidden meaning may be embedded into the message because harmony and "saving face" is more important than truth and confrontation. In indirect cultures, such as those in Latin America, business conversations may start with discussions of the weather, or family, or topics other than business as the partners gain a sense of each other, long before the topic of business is raised.

- **Elaborate** styles of communication refer to the use of rich and expressive language in everyday conversation. The French, Latin Americans, Africans, and Arabs tend to use exaggerated communication because in their cultures, simple statements may be interpreted to mean the exact opposite.

- **Understated** communication styles value simple understatement, simple assertions, and silence. People who speak sparingly tend to be trusted more than people who speak a lot. Prudent word choice allows an individual to be socially discreet, gain social acceptance, and avoid social penalty. In Japan, the pleasure of a conversation lies "not in discussion (a logical game), but in emotional exchange" (Nakane, 1970) with the purpose of social harmony (Barnlund, 1975).

Communication Accommodation and Code-Switching

Communication accommodation theory is a theory that explores why and how people modify their communication to fit situational, social, cultural, and relational contexts (Giles, Taylor, & Bourhis, 1973). Within communication accommodation, conversational partners may use *convergence*, meaning a person makes their communication more like another person. People who are accommodating in their communication style are seen as more competent, which illustrates the benefits of communicative flexibility. In order to be flexible, of course, people have to be aware of and monitor their own and others' communication patterns. Conversely, conversational partners may use *divergence*, meaning a person uses communication to emphasize the differences between his or her conversational partner and his or herself.

Convergence and divergence can take place within the same conversation and may be used by one or both conversational partners. Convergence functions to make others feel at ease, to increase understanding, and to enhance social bonds. Divergence may be used to intentionally make another person feel unwelcome or perhaps to highlight a person, group, or cultural identity.

While communication accommodation might involve anything from adjusting how fast or slow you talk to how long you speak during each turn, *code-switching* refers to changes in accent, dialect, or language (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). There are many reasons that people might code-switch. Regarding accents, some people hire vocal coaches or speech-language pathologists to help them alter their accents. If a Southern person thinks their accent is leading others to form unfavorable impressions, they can consciously change their accent with much practice and effort. Once their ability to speak without their Southern accent is honed, they may be able to switch very quickly between their native accent when speaking with friends and family and their modified accent when speaking in professional settings.

People who work or live in multilingual settings may engage in code-switching several times a day.

Eltpics – Welsh – CC BY-NC 2.0.

"Getting Critical"

Hate Speech

Hate is a term that has many different meanings and can be used to communicate teasing, mild annoyance, or anger. The term *hate*, as it relates to hate speech, has a much more complex and serious meaning. *Hate* refers to extreme negative beliefs and feelings toward a group or member of a group because of their race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or ability (Waltman & Haas, 2011). We can get a better understanding of the intensity of hate by distinguishing it from anger, which is an emotion that we experience much more regularly. First, anger is directed toward an individual, while hate is directed toward a social or cultural group. Second, anger doesn't prevent a person from having sympathy for the target of his or her anger, but hate erases sympathy for the target. Third, anger is usually the result of personal insult or injury, but hate can exist and grow even with no direct interaction with the target. Fourth, anger isn't an emotion that people typically find pleasure in, while hatred can create feelings of self-righteousness and superiority that lead to pleasure. Last, anger is an emotion that usually dissipates as time passes, eventually going away, while hate can endure for much longer (Waltman & Haas, 2011). Hate speech is a verbal manifestation of this intense emotional and mental state.

Hate speech is usually used by people who have a polarized view of their own group (the in-group) and another group (the out-group). Hate speech is then used to intimidate people in the out-group and to motivate and influence members of the in-group. Hate speech often promotes hate-based violence and is also used to solidify in-group identification and attract new members (Waltman & Haas, 2011). Perpetrators of hate speech often engage in totalizing, which means they define a person or a group based on one quality or characteristic, ignoring all others. A Lebanese American may be the target of hate speech because the perpetrators reduce him to a Muslim—whether he actually is Muslim or not would be irrelevant. Grouping all Middle Eastern- or Arab-looking people together is a dehumanizing activity that is typical to hate speech.

Incidents of hate speech and hate crimes have increased over the past fifteen years. Hate crimes, in particular, have gotten more attention due to the passage of more laws against hate crimes and the increased amount of tracking by various levels of law enforcement. The Internet has also made it easier for hate groups to organize and spread their hateful messages. As these changes have taken place over the past fifteen years, there has been much discussion about hate speech and its legal and constitutional implications. While hate crimes resulting in damage to a person or property are regularly prosecuted, it is sometimes argued that hate speech that doesn't result in such damage is protected under the US Constitution's First Amendment, which guarantees free speech. Just recently, in 2011, the Supreme Court found in the *Snyder v. Phelps* case that speech and actions of the members of the Westboro Baptist Church, who regularly protest the funerals of American soldiers with signs reading things like "Thank God for Dead Soldiers" and "Fag Sin = 9/11," were protected and not criminal. Chief Justice Roberts wrote in the decision, “We cannot react to [the Snyder family’s] pain by punishing the speaker. As a nation we have chosen a different course—to protect even hurtful speech on public issues to ensure that we do not stifle public debate” (Exploring Constitutional Conflicts, 2012).

1. Do you think the First Amendment of the Constitution, guaranteeing free speech to US citizens, should protect hate speech? Why or why not?
2. Visit the Southern Poverty Law Center’s “Hate Map” (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2012) (http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/hate-map) to see what hate groups they have identified in your state. Are you surprised by the number/nature of the groups listed in your state? Briefly describe a group that you didn’t know about and identify the target of its hate and the reasons it gives for its hate speech.

Key Takeaways

- Getting integrated: Social context influences the ways in which we use language, and we have been socialized to follow implicit social rules like those that guide the flow of conversations, including how we start and end our interactions and how we change topics. The way we use language changes as we shift among academic, professional, personal, and civic contexts.

- The language that we speak influences our cultural identities and our social realities. We internalize norms and rules that help us function in our own culture but that can lead to misunderstanding when used in other cultural contexts.
- We can adapt to different cultural contexts by purposely changing our communication. Communication accommodation theory explains that people may adapt their communication to be more similar to or different from others based on various contexts.
- We should become aware of how our verbal communication reveals biases toward various cultural identities based on race, gender, age, sexual orientation, and ability.

Exercises

1. Recall a conversation that became awkward when you or the other person deviated from the social norms that manage conversation flow. Was the awkwardness at the beginning, end, or during a topic change? After reviewing some of the common norms discussed in the chapter, what do you think was the source of the awkwardness?
2. Describe an accent or a dialect that you find pleasing/interesting. Describe an accent/dialect that you do not find pleasing/interesting. Why do you

think you evaluate one positively and the other negatively?

3. Review how cultural bias relates to the five cultural identities discussed earlier. Identify something you learned about bias related to one of these identities that you didn't know before. What can you do now to be more aware of how verbal communication can reinforce cultural biases?

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3.4 Improving Verbal Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Discuss how the process of abstraction and the creation of whole messages relate to language clarity.
2. Employ figurative and evocative language.
3. Determine how to build intercultural competence.
4. Identify strategies for using language ethically.

Have you ever gotten lost because someone gave you directions that didn't make sense to you? Have you ever puzzled over the instructions for how to put something like a bookshelf or grill together? When people don't use words well, there are consequences that range from mild annoyance to legal actions. When people do use words well, they can be inspiring and make us better people. In this section, we will learn how to use words effectively.

Using Words Clearly

The level of clarity with which we speak varies depending on whom we talk to, the situation we're in, and our own intentions and motives. We sometimes make a deliberate effort to speak as clearly as possible. We can indicate this concern for clarity nonverbally by slowing our rate and increasing our volume or verbally by saying, “Frankly…” or “Let me be clear…” Sometimes it can be difficult to speak clearly—for example, when we are speaking about something with which we are unfamiliar. Emotions and distractions can also interfere with our clarity. Being aware of the varying levels of abstraction within language can help us create clearer and more “whole” messages.

Ambiguous Language

Ambiguous language is language that can have various meanings. Google Jay Leno’s headlines videos. Sometimes he uses advertisements that are very abstract. For instance, there is a restaurant ad that says, “People are our best ingredient!” What comes to mind when you hear that? Are they actually using people in their food? Or do they mean their customer service is what makes their restaurant notable? When we are trying to communicate with others, it is important that we are clear in our language. We need others to know exactly what we mean and not imply meaning. Below are ways to clear up ambiguous language.

Level of Abstraction

The ladder of abstraction is a model used to illustrate how language can range from concrete to abstract. As we follow a concept up the ladder of abstraction, more and more of the “essence” of the original object is lost or left out, which leaves more room for interpretation, which can lead to misunderstanding. This process of abstracting, of leaving things out, allows us to communicate more effectively because it serves as a shorthand that keeps us from having a completely unmanageable language filled with millions of words—each referring to one specific thing (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990). But it requires us to use context and often other words to generate shared meaning. Some words are more directly related to a concept or idea than others. If I asked you to go take a picture of a book, you could do that. If I asked you to go and take a picture of “work,” you couldn’t because *work* is an abstract word that was developed to refer to any number of possibilities from the act of writing a book, to repairing an air conditioner, to fertilizing an organic garden. You could take a picture of any of those things, but you can’t take a picture of “work.”

Figure 3.2 Ladder of Abstraction

Source: Adapted from S. I. Hayakawa and Alan R. Hayakawa, *Language in Thought and Action*, 5th ed. (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace, 1990), 85.

You can see the semanticist S. I. Hayakawa's classic example of the abstraction ladder with "Bessie the cow" in Figure 3.2 "Ladder of Abstraction" (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990). At the lowest level, we have something that is very concrete. At this level we are actually in the moment of experiencing the stimuli that is coming in through our senses. We perceive the actual "thing," which is the "cow" in front of us (either in person or as an image). This is concrete, because it is unmediated, meaning it is actually the moment of experience. As we move up a level, we give the experience a name—we are looking at "Bessie." So now, instead of the direct experience with the "thing" in front of us, we have given the thing a name, which takes us one step away from the direct experience to the use of a more abstract symbol. Now we can talk and think about Bessie even when we aren't directly experiencing her. At the next level, the word *cow* now lumps Bessie in with other bovine creatures that share similar characteristics. As we go on up the ladder, *cow* becomes *livestock*, *livestock* becomes an *asset*, and then an *asset* becomes *wealth*. Note that it becomes increasingly difficult to define the meaning of the symbol as we go up the ladder and how with each step we lose more of the characteristics of the original concrete experience.

When shared referents are important, we should try to use language that is lower on the ladder of abstraction. Being intentionally concrete is useful when giving directions, for example, and can help prevent misunderstanding. We sometimes intentionally use abstract language. Since abstract language is often unclear or vague, we can use it as a means of testing out a potential topic (like asking a favor), offering negative feedback indirectly (to avoid hurting someone's feelings or to hint), or avoiding the specifics of a topic.

Definitions and Clarity

Knowing more about the role that abstraction plays in the generation of meaning can help us better describe and define the words we use. As we learned earlier, denotative definitions are those found in the dictionary—the official or agreed-on definition. Since definitions are composed of other words, people who compile dictionaries take for granted that there is a certain amount of familiarity with the words they use to define another word—otherwise, we would just be going in circles. One challenge we face when defining words is our tendency to go up the ladder of abstraction rather than down (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990). For example, if I asked you to define the word *blue*, you'd likely say it's a color. If I asked you what a color is, you'd tell me it's a tint or characteristic of the appearance of a particular thing. To define more clearly, by going down the ladder of abstraction, you could say, "It's the color of Frank Sinatra's eyes," or "It's what the sky looks like on a clear day." People often come to understanding more quickly when a definition is descriptive and/or ties into their personal experiences. Definitions aren't useless, but they are usually best when paired with examples. *Jargon* refers to specialized words used by a certain group or profession. Since jargon is specialized, it is often difficult to relate to a diverse audience and should therefore be limited when speaking to people from outside the group—or at least be clearly defined when it is used.

Formal versus Informal Language

You probably know by now that how we communicate in different contexts can vary greatly. For example, how you compose a text to your best friend is going to use different grammatical structures and words than when you compose an email to your professor. One of the main reasons for this difference is because of formal and informal language. Table 4.4.1 provides a general overview of the major differences between formal and informal language.

Table 4.4.1 Formal vs. Informal Language

Formal Language	**Informal Language**
Used in carefully edited communication.	Used in impromptu, conversational communication.
Used in academic or official content.	Used in everyday communication.
The sentence structure is long and complicated.	The sentence structure is short, choppy, and improvised.
The emphasis is on grammatical correctness.	The emphasis is on easily understood messages using everyday phrases.
Uses the passive voice.	Uses the active voice.
Often communicated from a detached, third person perspective.	Perspective is less of a problem (1^{st}, 2^{nd} or 3^{rd}).
Speakers/writers avoid the use of contractions.	Speakers/writers can actively include contractions.
Avoid the inclusion of emotionally laden ideas and words.	It allows for the inclusion of emotions and empathy.
Language should be objective.	Language can be subjective.
Language should avoid the use of colloquialisms.	It's perfectly appropriate to use colloquialisms.
Only use an acronym after it has clearly been spelled out once.	People use acronyms without always clearly spelling out what it means.
All sentences should be complete (clear subjects and verbs).	Sentences may be incomplete (lacking a clear subject and/or verb).
The use of pronouns should be avoided.	The use of personal pronouns is common.
Avoids artistic languages as much as possible.	Includes a range of artistic language choices (e.g., alliteration, anaphora, hyperbole, onomatopoeia, etc.).
Arguments are supported by facts and documented research.	Arguments are supported by personal beliefs and opinions.
Language is gender neutral.	Language includes gender references.

Formal Language	Informal Language
Avoids the imperative voice.	Uses the imperative voice.

Formal Language

When applying for a job, you will most likely use formal language in your cover letter and resume. *Formal language* is official and academic language. You want to appear intelligent and capable, so formal language helps you accomplish those goals. Formal language often occurs when we write. Formal language uses full sentences and is grammatically correct. Formal language is more objective and more complex. Most legal agreements are written in formal language.

Informal Language

Informal language is common, everyday language, which might include slang words. It is continuous and casual. We use informal language when we talk to other people. It is more simple. Informal language tends to use more contractions and abbreviations. If you look at your text messages, you will probably see several examples of informal language.

Creating Whole Messages

Earlier we learned about the four types of expressions, which are observations, thoughts, feelings, and needs. Whole messages include all the relevant types of expressions needed to most effectively communicate in a given situation, including what you see, what you think, what you feel, and what you need (McKay, Davis, & Fanning, 1995). Partial messages are missing a relevant type of expression and can lead to misunderstanding and conflict. Whole messages help keep lines of communication open, which can help build solid relationships. On the other hand, people can often figure out a message is partial even if they can't readily identify what is left out. For example, if Roscoe says to Rachel, "I don't trust Bob anymore," Rachel may be turned off or angered by Roscoe's conclusion (an expression of thought) about their mutual friend. However, if Roscoe recounted his observation of Bob's behavior, how that behavior made him feel, and what he needs from Rachel in this situation, she will be better able to respond.

While partial messages lack relevant expressions needed to clearly communicate, contaminated messages include mixed or misleading expressions (McKay, Davis, & Fanning, 1995). For example, if Alyssa says to her college-aged daughter, "It looks like you wasted another semester," she has contaminated observations, feelings, and thoughts. Although the message appears to be an observation, there are underlying messages that are better brought to the surface. To decontaminate her message, and make it more whole and less alienating, Alyssa could more clearly express herself by saying, "Your dad and I talked, and he said you told him you failed your sociology class and are thinking about changing your major" (observation). "I think you're hurting your chances of graduating on time and getting started on your career" (thought). "I feel anxious because you and I are both taking out loans to pay for your education" (feeling).

Messages in which needs are contaminated with observations or feelings can be confusing. For example, if Shea says to Duste, "You're so lucky that you don't have to worry about losing your scholarship over this stupid biology final," it seems like he's expressing an observation, but it's really a thought, with an underlying feeling and need. To make the message more whole, Shea could bring the need and feeling to the surface: "I noticed you did really well on the last exam in our biology class" (observation). "I'm really stressed about the exam next week and the possibility of losing my scholarship if I fail it" (feeling). "Would you be willing to put together a study group with me?" (need). More clarity in language is important, but as we already know, communication isn't just about exchanging information—the words we use also influence our emotions and relationships.

Figurative Language

When people say something is a "figure of speech," they are referring to a word or phrase that deviates from expectations in some way in meaning or usage (Yaguello, 1998). Figurative language is the result of breaking semantic rules, but in a way that typically enhances meaning or understanding rather than diminishes it. To understand figurative language, a person has to be familiar with the semantic rules of a language and also with social norms and patterns within a cultural and/or language group, which makes it difficult for nonnative speakers to grasp. Figurative language has the ability to convey much meaning in fewer words because some of the meaning lies in the context of usage (what a listener can imply by the deviation from semantic norms) and in the listener (how the listener makes meaning by connecting the figurative language to his or her personal experience). Some examples of figurative speech include simile, metaphor, and personification.

A *simile* is a direct comparison of two things using the words *like* or *as*. Similes can be very explicit for the purpose of conveying a specific meaning and can help increase clarity and lead people to personally connect to a meaning since they have to visualize the comparison in their mind. For example, Forrest Gump's famous simile, "Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get," conjures up feelings of uncertainty and excitement. More direct similes like "I slept like a baby" and "That bread was hard as a rock" do not necessarily stir the imagination but still offer an alternative way of expressing something.

A *metaphor* is an implicit comparison of two things that are not alike and/or are not typically associated. They become meaningful as people realize the speaker's purpose for relating the two seemingly disparate ideas. Metaphors are figurative devices that can make our writing and speaking richer, but they require a person to balance creative associations among ideas with the common rules of the language if people are expected to figure out the meaning behind the association. A speaker must have the linguistic knowledge and insight to realize when a nonliteral use of words or ideas will be more meaningful than a literal and conventional use of those words. Metaphors challenge the imagination, which can cause each person to make sense of the metaphor in his or her own way (Olbricht, 1968).

Evocative language

Vivid language captures people's attention and their imagination by conveying emotions and actions. Think of the array of mental images that a poem or a well-told story from a friend can conjure up. Evocative language can also lead us to have physical reactions. Words like *shiver* and *heartbroken* can lead people to remember previous physical sensations related to the word. As a speaker, there may be times when evoking a positive or negative reaction could be beneficial. Evoking a sense of calm could help you talk a friend through troubling health news. Evoking a sense of agitation and anger could help you motivate an audience to action. When we are conversing with a friend or speaking to an audience, we are primarily engaging others' visual and auditory senses. Evocative language can help your conversational partner or audience members feel, smell, or taste something as well as hear it and see it. Good writers know how to use words effectively and affectively. A well-written story, whether it is a book or screenplay, will contain all the previous elements. The rich fantasy worlds conceived in *Star Trek*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *Twilight*, and *Harry Potter* show the power of figurative and evocative language to capture our attention and our imagination.

Some words are so evocative that their usage violates the social norms of appropriate conversations. Although we could use such words to intentionally shock people, we can also use *euphemisms*, or less evocative synonyms for or indirect references to words or ideas that are deemed inappropriate to discuss directly. We have many euphemisms for things like excretory acts, sex, and death (Allan & Burridge, 2006). For example, many people will say "passed away" instead of "died." While euphemisms can be socially useful and creative, they can also lead to misunderstanding and problems in cases where more direct communication is warranted despite social conventions.

Intercultural Communication Competence

Has learning about another culture changed or enhanced your impressions for the better? The gateway to such connections is intercultural communication competence. Another way to view *intercultural communication competence* is the ability to communicate and behave in appropriate ways with those who are culturally different. You are *interculturally competent* when you adapt to cultural differences by co-creating spaces, teams, and organizations that are inclusive, effective, innovative, and satisfying. You can strengthen your intercultural communication competence by becoming more world-minded, practicing attributional complexity, and using communication accommodation.

World-Mindedness

By possessing *world-mindedness*, you demonstrated acceptance and respect toward other cultures' beliefs, values, and customs or *worldviews* (Hammer, Bennett & Wiseman, 2003; Merryfield, et al (2008). Practic*ing world-mindedness happens in thr*ee ways. First, you must accept others' expression of their culture or co-culture as a natural element of their communication patterns (Chen & Starosa, 2005). Second, you should avoid any temptation to judge others' *worldviews* as "better" or "worse" than your own. Third, treat people from all cultures with respect.

By practicing world-mindedness, you are more than just tolerating cultural differences that you find perplexing or problematic, you are preserving others' dignity. World-mindedness is the opposite of *ethnocentrism* or the belief that one's own cultural beliefs, attitudes, values, and practices are superior to others. Ethnocentrism is not the same thing as patriotism or pride in your own cultural heritage. You can be patriotic and proud of your own heritage without being ethnocentric! Ethnocentrism is a comparative evaluation where people view their own culture or co-culture as the standard against which all other cultures should be judged (Sumner, 1906; Neulip & McCroskey, 1997). Consequently, such people tend to view themselves as competent communicators and people from other cultures as incompetent communicators.

Attributional Complexity

Practicing *attributional complexity* means that you acknowledge that other people's behaviors have complex causes. You have the ability to observe others' behavior and analyze the various forces that might be influencing it. For example, rather than deciding that a reserved classmate is unfriendly, you might consider cultural theories about communication styles, and language usage before passing judgment.

In addition, you might check you might want to use perception checking to check your understanding of someone's words or behaviors. Perception-checking helps us try to see things from another perspective. It allows us to examine how people from other cultural backgrounds make decisions and allows us to make comparisons of their approaches to ours. nd finally, it allows others to explain the reasons for their behavior and allows us to validate their explanations rather than challenging them.

Communication Accommodation

Another way to strive for intercultural communication competence is to embrace *communication accommodation* by meshing your communication with the behaviors of people from other cultures. People are especially motivated to adapt their communication when they see social approval, when they wish to establish relationships with others, and when they view the language use of others as appropriate (Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991). What does this mean for intercultural communicators? Try adapting to other people's communication preferences (Bianconi, 2002). Notice how long a turn people take when speaking, how quickly or slowly they speak, how direct or indirect they are, and how much they appear to want to talk compared to you. You may also need to learn and practice cultural norms for nonverbal behaviors, including eye contact, power distance, and touch. Use caution to avoid inappropriate imitation though. Mimicking could be considered disrespectful in some cultural contexts, whereas an honest desire to learn is often interpreted positively on the road to intercultural communication competence.

"Getting Competent"

Using Words Well

This chapter discusses several playful, creative, and engaging aspects of verbal communication. Employing language in an engaging way requires some effort for most people in terms of learning the rules of a language system, practicing, and expanding your vocabulary and expressive repertoire. Only milliseconds pass before a thought is verbalized and "out there" in the world. Since we've already learned that we have to be accountable for the short- and long-term effects of our communication, we know being able to monitor our verbal communication and follow the old adage to "think before we speak" is an asset. Using language for effect is difficult, but it can make your speech unique whether it is in a conversation or in front of a larger audience. Aside from communicating ideas, speech also leaves lasting impressions. The following are some tips for using words well that can apply to various settings but may be particularly useful in situations where one person is trying to engage the attention of an audience.

- Use concrete words to make new concepts or ideas relevant to the experience of your listeners.
- Use an appropriate level of vocabulary. It is usually obvious when people are trying to speak at a level that is out of their comfort zone, which can hurt credibility.
- Avoid public speeches that are too rigid and unnatural. Even though public speaking is more formal than conversation, it is usually OK to use contractions and personal pronouns. Not doing so

would make the speech awkward and difficult to deliver since it is not a typical way of speaking.

- Avoid "bloating" your language by using unnecessary words. Don't say "it is ever apparent" when you can just say "it's clear."
- Use vivid words to paint mental images for your listeners. Take them to places outside of the immediate setting through rich description.
- Use repetition to emphasize key ideas.
- When giving a formal speech that you have time to prepare for, record your speech and listen to your words. Have your outline with you and take note of areas that seem too bland, bloated, or confusing and then edit them before you deliver the speech.

1. What are some areas of verbal communication that you can do well on? What are some areas of verbal communication that you could improve?
2. Think of a time when a speaker's use of language left a positive impression on you. What concepts from this chapter can you apply to their verbal communication to help explain why it was so positive?
3. Think of a time when a speaker's use of language left a negative impression on you. What concepts from this chapter can you apply to their verbal communication to help explain why it was so negative?

Using Words Ethically

We learned in chapter 1 that communication is irreversible. We also learned that, among other things, the National Communication Association's "Credo for Ethical Communication" states that we should be accountable for the long- and short-term effects of our communication (National Communication Association, 2012). The way we talk, the words we choose to use, and the actions we take after we are done speaking are all important aspects of communication ethics. Earlier we learned that language is performative, meaning that it can exceed the exchange of information and actually perform certain actions. Knowing that language can have real effects on people increases our need to be aware of the ethical implications of what we say.

Civility

Our strong emotions regarding our own beliefs, attitudes, and values can sometimes lead to incivility in our verbal communication. Incivility occurs when a person deviates from established social norms and can take many forms, including insults, bragging, bullying, gossiping, swearing, deception, and defensiveness, among others (Miller, 2001). Some people lament that we live in a time when civility is diminishing, but since standards and expectations for what is considered civil communication have changed over time, this isn't the only time such claims have been made (Miller, 2001). As individualism and affluence have increased in many societies, so have the number of idiosyncratic identities that people feel they have the right to express. These increases could contribute to the impression that society is becoming less civil, when in fact it is just becoming different. As we learned in our section on perception and personality, we tend to assume other people are like us, and we may be disappointed or offended when we realize they are not. Cultural changes have probably contributed to making people less willing to engage in self-restraint, which again would be seen as uncivil by people who prefer a more restrained and self-controlled expression (Miller, 2001).

Some journalists, media commentators, and scholars have argued that the "flaming" that happens on comment sections of websites and blogs is a type of verbal incivility that presents a threat to our democracy (Brooks & Greer, 2007). Other scholars of communication and democracy have not as readily labeled such communication "uncivil" (Cammaerts, 2009). It has long been argued that civility is important for the functioning and growth of a democracy (Kingwell, 1995). But in the new digital age of democracy where technologies like Twitter and Facebook have started democratic revolutions, some argue that the Internet and other new media have opened spaces in which people can engage in cyberactivism and express marginal viewpoints that may otherwise not be heard (Dahlberg, 2007). In any case, researchers have identified several aspects of language use online that are typically viewed as negative: name-calling, character assassination, and the use of obscene language (Sobieraj & Berry, 2011). So what contributes to such uncivil behavior—online and offline? The following are some common individual and situational influences that may lead to breaches of civility (Miller, 2001):

- **Individual differences.** Some people differ in their interpretations of civility in various settings, and some people have personality traits that may lead to actions deemed uncivil on a more regular basis.
- **Ignorance.** In some cases, especially in novel situations involving uncertainty, people may not know what social norms and expectations are.
- **Lack of skill.** Even when we know how to behave, we may not be able to do it. Such frustrations may lead a person to revert to undesirable behavior such as engaging in personal attacks

during a conflict because they don't know what else to do.

- **Lapse of control.** Self-control is not an unlimited resource. Even when people know how to behave and have the skill to respond to a situation appropriately, they may not do so. Even people who are careful to monitor their behavior have occasional slipups.
- **Negative intent.** Some people, in an attempt to break with conformity or challenge societal norms, or for self-benefit (publicly embarrassing someone in order to look cool or edgy), are openly uncivil. Such behavior can also result from mental or psychological stresses or illnesses.

Polarizing Language

Philosophers of language have long noted our tendency to verbally represent the world in very narrow ways when we feel threatened (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990). This misrepresents reality and closes off dialogue. Although in our everyday talk we describe things in nuanced and measured ways, quarrels and controversies often narrow our vision, which is reflected in our vocabulary. In order to maintain a civil discourse in which people interact ethically and competently, it has been suggested that we keep an open mind and an open vocabulary.

One feature of communicative incivility is *polarizing language*, which refers to language that presents people, ideas, or situations as polar opposites. Such language exaggerates differences and overgeneralizes. Things aren't simply black or white, right or wrong, or good or bad. Being able to only see two values and clearly accepting one and rejecting another doesn't indicate sophisticated or critical thinking. We don't have to accept every viewpoint as right and valid, and we can still hold strongly to our own beliefs and defend them without ignoring other possibilities or rejecting or alienating others. A citizen who says, "All cops are corrupt," is just as wrong as the cop who says, "All drug users are scum." In avoiding polarizing language we keep a more open mind, which may lead us to learn something new. A citizen may have a personal story about a negative encounter with a police officer that could enlighten us on his or her perspective, but the statement also falsely overgeneralizes that experience. Avoiding polarizing language can help us avoid polarized thinking, and the new information we learn may allow us to better understand and advocate for our position. Avoiding sweeping generalizations allows us to speak more clearly and hopefully avoid defensive reactions from others that result from such blanket statements.

Static Evaluation

Oftentimes, we think that people and things do not change, but they do change. If you ever watch reality shows, you might see people who go through amazing transformations, perhaps through weight loss, a makeover, or life expereinces. These people changed. *Static evaluation* states that things are not constant. Things vary over time, and our language should be representative of that change. For instance, if your friend Max hurt you and you think that Max is a bad friend. It is important to note that Max might have done something bad at one time time or may have displayed bad behavior, but it may not represent how Max will be in the future.

Swearing

Scholars have identified two main types of swearing: social swearing and annoyance swearing (Baruch & Jenkins, 2007). People engage in social swearing to create social bonds or for impression management (to seem cool or attractive). This type of swearing is typically viewed as male dominated, but some research studies have shown that the differences in frequency and use of swearing by men and women aren't as vast as perceived. Nevertheless, there is generally more of a social taboo against women swearing than men, but as you already know, communication is contextual. Annoyance swearing provides a sense of relief, as people use it to manage stress and tension, which can be a preferred alternative to physical aggression. In some cases, swearing can be cathartic, allowing a person to release emotions that might otherwise lead to more aggressive or violent actions.

In the past few decades, the amount of profanity used in regular conversations and on television shows and movies has increased. This rise has been connected to a variety of factors, including increasing social informality since the 1960s and a decrease in the centrality of traditional/conservative religious views in many Western cultures (Baruch & Jenkins, 2007). As a result of these changes, the shock value that swearing once had is lessening, and this desensitization has contributed to its spread. You have probably even noticed in your lifetime that the amount of swearing on television has increased, and in June of 2012, the Supreme Court stripped the Federal Communications Commission of some of its authority to fine broadcasters for obscenities (Liptak, 2012). There has also been a reaction, or backlash, to this spread, which is most publicly evidenced by the website, book, and other materials produced by the Cuss Control Academy (http://www.cusscontrol.com) (O'Connor, 2012). Although swearing is often viewed as negative and uncivil, some scholars argue for its positive effects (Baruch & Jenkins, 2007). Specifically, swearing can help people to better express their feelings and to develop social bonds. In fact, swearing is typically associated more with the emotional part of the brain than the verbal part of the brain, as evidenced by people who suffer trauma to the verbal part of their brain and lose all other language function but are still able to swear (Allan & Burridge, 2006).

Accountability

The complexity of our verbal language system allows us to present inferences as facts and mask judgments within seemingly objective or oblique language. As an ethical speaker and a critical listener, it is important to be able to distinguish between facts, inferences, and judgments (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990). *Inferences* are conclusions based on thoughts or speculation, but not direct observation. *Facts* are conclusions based on direct observation or group consensus. *Judgments* are expressions of approval or disapproval that are subjective and not verifiable.

Linguists have noted that a frequent source of miscommunication is inference-observation confusion, or the misperception of an inference (conclusion based on limited information) as an observation (an observed or agreed-on fact) (Haney, 1992). We can see the possibility for such confusion in the following example: If a student posts on a professor-rating site the statement "This professor grades unfairly and plays favorites," then they are presenting an inference and a judgment that could easily be interpreted as a fact. Using some of the strategies discussed earlier for speaking clearly can help present information in a more ethical way—for example, by using concrete and descriptive language and owning emotions and thoughts through the use of "I *language*." To help clarify the message and be more accountable, the student could say, "I worked for three days straight on my final paper and only got a C," which we will assume is a statement of fact. This could then be followed up with "But my friend told me she only worked on hers the day before it was due and she got an A. I think that's unfair and I feel like my efforts aren't recognized by the professor." Of the last two statements, the first states what may be a fact (note, however, that the information is secondhand rather than directly observed) and the second states an inferred conclusion and expresses an owned thought and feeling. Sometimes people don't want to mark their statements as inferences because they want to believe them as facts. In this case, the student may have attributed her grade to the professor's "unfairness" to cover up or avoid thoughts that her friend may be a better student in this subject area, a better writer, or a better student in general. Distinguishing between facts, inferences, and judgments, however, allows your listeners to better understand your message and judge the merits of it, which makes us more accountable and therefore more ethical speakers.

Key Takeaways

- The symbolic nature of language means that misunderstanding can easily occur when words and their definitions are abstract (far removed from the object or idea to which the symbol refers). The creation of whole messages, which contain relevant observations, thoughts, feelings, and needs, can help reduce misunderstandings.
- Affective language refers to language used to express a person's feelings and create similar feelings in another person. Metaphor, simile, personification, and vivid language can evoke emotions in speaker and listener.
- Incivility occurs when people deviate from accepted social norms for communication and behavior and manifests in swearing and polarized language that casts people and ideas as opposites. People can reduce incivility by being more accountable for the short- and long-term effects of their communication.

Exercises

1. Following the example in the ladder of abstraction, take a common word referring to an object (like *bicycle* or *smartphone*) and write its meaning, in your own words, at each step from most concrete to most abstract. Discuss how the meaning changes as the word/idea becomes more abstract and how the word becomes more difficult to define.
2. Decontaminate the following messages by rewriting them in a way that makes them whole (separate out each type of relevant expression). You can fill in details if needed to make your expressions more meaningful.

    - "I feel like you can't ever take me seriously."
    - "It looks like you've ruined another perfectly good relationship."

3. Find a famous speech (for example, at http://www.americanrhetoric.com) and identify components of figurative language. How do these elements add to the meaning of the speech?
4. Getting integrated: Review the section on using words ethically. Identify a situation in which language could be used unethically in each of the following contexts: academic, professional, personal, and civic. Specifically tie your example to civility, polarizing language, swearing, or accountability.

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PART IV

CHAPTER 4: NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

When we think about communication, we most often focus on how we exchange information using words. While verbal communication is important, humans relied on nonverbal communication for thousands of years before we developed the capability to communicate with words. **Nonverbal communication** is a process of generating meaning using behavior other than words. Rather than thinking of nonverbal communication as the opposite of or as separate from verbal communication, it's more accurate to view them as operating side by side—as part of the same system. Yet, as part of the same system, they still have important differences, including how the brain processes them. For instance, nonverbal communication is typically governed by the right side of the brain and verbal, the left.Peter A. Andersen, *Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions* (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 2–8. This hemispheric distinction has been clearly evidenced, as people who suffer trauma to the right side of their brain lose the ability to recognize facial expressions but can still process verbal communication. Conversely, people whose left hemisphere of the brain is damaged lose the ability to speak, read, and understand language. Interestingly, a person with damage to the left hemisphere of the brain who loses the ability to speak can often still sing since the creation, but not the reading, of music is governed by the right brain. The content and composition of verbal and nonverbal communication also differs. In terms of content, nonverbal communication tends to do the work of communicating emotions more than verbal. In terms of composition, although there are rules of grammar that structure our verbal communication, no such official guides govern our use of nonverbal signals. Likewise, there aren't dictionaries and thesauruses of nonverbal communication like there are with verbal symbols. Finally, whereas we humans are unique in our capacity to abstract and transcend space and time using verbal symbols, we are not the only creatures that engage in nonverbal communication.Owen Hargie, *Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice*, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 49. These are just some of the characteristics that differentiate verbal communication from nonverbal, and in the remainder of this chapter we will discuss in more detail the principles, functions, and types of nonverbal communication and conclude with some guidance on how to improve our nonverbal communication competence.

4.1 Principles and Functions of Nonverbal Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Define nonverbal communication.
2. Compare and contrast verbal communication and nonverbal communication.
3. Discuss the principles of nonverbal communication.
4. Provide examples of the functions of nonverbal communication.

As you'll recall from our introductory chapter, a channel is the sensory route on which a message travels. Oral communication only relies on one channel, because spoken language is transmitted through sound and picked up by our ears. Nonverbal communication, on the other hand, can be taken in by all five of our senses. Since most of our communication relies on visual and auditory channels, those will be the focus of this chapter. But we can also receive messages and generate meaning through touch, taste, and smell. Touch is an especially powerful form of nonverbal communication that we will discuss in this chapter, but we will not get into taste and smell, which have not received as much scholarly attention in relation to nonverbal communication as the other senses.

Principles of Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication has a distinct history and serves separate evolutionary functions from verbal communication. For example, nonverbal communication is primarily biologically based while verbal communication is primarily culturally based. This is evidenced by the fact that some nonverbal communication has the same meaning across cultures while no verbal communication systems share the same universal recognizability (Andersen, 1999). Nonverbal communication also evolved earlier than verbal communication and served an early and important survival function that helped humans later develop verbal communication. While some of our nonverbal communication abilities, like our sense of smell, lost strength as our verbal capacities increased, other abilities like paralanguage and movement have grown alongside verbal complexity. The fact that nonverbal communication is processed by an older part of our brain makes it more instinctual and involuntary than verbal communication.

Nonverbal Communication can be Involuntary

There are some instances in which we verbally communicate involuntarily. These types of exclamations are often verbal responses to a surprising stimulus. For example, we say "owww!" when we stub our toe or scream "stop!" when we see someone heading toward danger. Involuntary nonverbal signals are much more common, and although most nonverbal communication isn't completely involuntary, it is more below our consciousness than verbal communication and therefore more difficult to control.

The involuntary nature of much nonverbal communication makes it more difficult to control or "fake." For example, although you can consciously smile a little and shake hands with someone when you first see them, it's difficult to fake that you're "happy" to meet someone. Nonverbal communication leaks out in ways that expose our underlying thoughts or feelings. Spokespeople, lawyers, or other public representatives who are the "face" of a politician, celebrity, corporation, or organization must learn to control their facial expressions and other nonverbal communication so they can effectively convey the message of their employer or client without having their personal thoughts and feelings leak through. Poker players, therapists, police officers, doctors, teachers, and actors are also in professions that often require them to have more awareness of and control over their nonverbal communication.

Have you ever tried to conceal your surprise, suppress your anger, or act joyful even when you weren't? Most people whose careers don't involve conscious manipulation of nonverbal signals find it difficult to control or suppress them. While we can consciously decide to stop sending verbal messages, our nonverbal communication always has the potential of generating meaning for another person. The teenager who decides to shut out his dad and not communicate with him still sends a message with his "blank" stare (still a facial expression) and lack of movement (still a gesture). In this sense, nonverbal communication is "irrepressible" (Andersen, 1999).

Nonverbal Communication Is More Ambiguous

In Chapter 3 we learn that the symbolic and abstract nature of language can lead to misunderstandings, but nonverbal communication is even more ambiguous. As with verbal communication, most of our nonverbal signals can be linked to multiple meanings, but unlike words, many nonverbal signals do not have any one specific meaning. If you've ever had someone wink at you and didn't know why, you've probably experienced this uncertainty. Did they wink to express their affection for you, their pleasure with something you just did, or because you share some inside knowledge or joke?

Just as we look at context clues in a sentence or paragraph to derive meaning from a particular word, we can look for context clues in various sources of information like the physical environment, other nonverbal signals, or verbal communication to make sense of a particular nonverbal cue. Unlike verbal communication, however, nonverbal communication doesn't have explicit rules of grammar that bring structure, order, and agreed-on patterns of usage. Instead, we implicitly learn norms of nonverbal communication, which leads to greater variance. In general, we exhibit more idiosyncrasies in our usage of nonverbal communication than we do with verbal communication, which also increases the ambiguity of nonverbal communication.

Nonverbal Communication Is More Credible

Although we can rely on verbal communication to fill in the blanks sometimes left by nonverbal expressions, we often put more trust into what people do over what they say. This is especially true in times of stress or danger when our behaviors become more instinctual and we rely on older systems of thinking and acting that evolved before our ability to speak and write (Andersen, 1999). This innateness creates intuitive feelings about the genuineness of nonverbal communication, and this genuineness relates back to our earlier discussion about the sometimes involuntary and often subconscious nature of nonverbal communication. An example of the innateness of nonverbal signals can be found in children who have been blind since birth but still exhibit the same facial expressions as other children. In short, the involuntary or subconscious nature of nonverbal communication makes it less easy to fake, which makes it seem more honest and credible. We will learn more about the role that nonverbal communication plays in deception later in this chapter.

Functions of Nonverbal Communication

A primary function of nonverbal communication is to convey meaning by reinforcing, substituting for, or contradicting verbal communication. Nonverbal communication is also used to influence others and regulate conversational flow. Perhaps even more important are the ways in which nonverbal communication functions as a central part of relational communication and identity expression.

Nonverbal Communication Conveys Meaning

Nonverbal communication conveys meaning by reinforcing, substituting for, or contradicting verbal communication. As we've already learned, verbal and nonverbal communication are two parts of the same system that often work side by side, helping us generate meaning. In terms of reinforcing verbal communication, gestures can help describe a space or shape that another person is unfamiliar with in ways that words alone cannot. Gestures also reinforce basic meaning—for example, pointing to the door when you tell someone to leave. Facial expressions reinforce the emotional states we convey through verbal communication. For example, smiling while telling a funny story better conveys your emotions (Hargie, 2011). Vocal variation can help us emphasize a particular part of a message, which helps reinforce a word or sentence's meaning. For example, saying "How was *your* weekend?" conveys a different meaning than "How was your *weekend*?"

Nonverbal communication can substitute for verbal communication in a variety of ways. Nonverbal communication can convey much meaning when verbal communication isn't effective because of language barriers. Language barriers are present when a person hasn't yet learned to speak or loses the ability to speak. For example, babies who have not yet developed language skills make facial expressions, at a few months old, that are similar to those of adults and therefore can generate meaning (Oster, Hegley, & Nagel, 1992). People who have developed language skills but can't use them because they have temporarily or permanently lost them or because they are using incompatible language codes, like in some cross-cultural encounters, can still communicate nonverbally. Although it's always a good idea to learn some of the local languages when you travel, gestures such as pointing or demonstrating the size or shape of something may suffice in a pinch.

Last, nonverbal communication can convey meaning by contradicting verbal communication. As we learned earlier, we often perceive nonverbal communication to be more credible than verbal communication. This is especially true when we receive mixed messages, or messages in which verbal and nonverbal signals contradict each other. For example, a person may say, "You can't do anything right!" in a mean tone but follow that up with a wink, which could indicate the person is teasing or joking. Mixed messages lead to uncertainty and confusion on the part of receivers, which leads us to look for more information to try to determine which message is more credible. If we are unable to resolve the discrepancy, we are likely to react negatively and potentially withdraw from the interaction (Hargie, 2011). Persistent mixed messages can lead to relational distress and hurt a person's credibility in professional settings.

About 65 percent of the meaning we derive during interactions comes from nonverbal communication.

Helena Peixoto – bored – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Nonverbal Communication Conveys Interpersonal and Emotional Messages

A central, if not primary, function of nonverbal communication is the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. Further, people who are skilled at encoding nonverbal messages have various interpersonal advantages, including being more popular, having larger social networks consisting of both acquaintances and close friends, and being less likely to be lonely or socially anxious (Riggio, 1992).

Nonverbal communication increases our expressivity, and people generally find it attractive and want to pay more attention to things that are expressive. This increases our chances of initiating interpersonal relationships. Relationships then form as a result of some initial exchanges of verbal and nonverbal information through mutual self-disclosure. As the depth of self-disclosure increases, messages become more meaningful if they are accompanied by congruent nonverbal cues. Impressions formed at this stage of interaction help determine whether or not a relationship will progress. As relationships progress from basic information exchange and the establishment of early interpersonal bonds to more substantial emotional connections, nonverbal communication plays a more central role. As we've learned, nonverbal communication conveys much emotional meaning, so the ability to effectively encode and decode appropriate nonverbal messages sent through facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, and touch leads to high-quality interactions that are rewarding for the communicators involved.

Nonverbal communication helps maintain relationships once they have moved beyond the initial stages by helping us communicate emotions and seek and provide social and emotional support. In terms of communicating emotions, competent communicators know when it is appropriate to express emotions and when more self-regulation is needed. They also know how to adjust their emotional expressions to fit various contexts and individuals, which is useful in preventing emotional imbalances within a relationship. Emotional imbalances occur when one relational partner expresses too much emotion in a way that becomes a burden for the other person. Ideally, each person in a relationship is able to express his or her emotions in a way that isn't too taxing for the other person. Occasionally, one relational partner may be going through an extended period of emotional distress, which can become very difficult for other people in his or her life. Since people with nonverbal communication competence are already more likely to have larger social support networks, it is likely that they will be able to spread their emotional communication, specifically related to negative emotions, in ways that do not burden others. Unfortunately, since people with less nonverbal skill are likely to have smaller social networks, they may end up targeting one or two people for their emotional communication, which could lead the other people to withdraw from the relationship.

Nonverbal communication allows us to give and request emotional support, which is a key part of relational communication.

Expressing the need for support is also an important part of relational maintenance. People who lack nonverbal encoding skills may send unclear or subtle cues requesting support that are not picked up on by others, which can lead to increased feelings of loneliness. Skilled encoders of nonverbal messages, on the other hand, are able to appropriately communicate the need for support in recognizable ways. As relationships progress in terms of closeness and intimacy, nonverbal signals become a shorthand form of communicating, as information can be conveyed with a particular look, gesture, tone of voice, or posture. Family members, romantic couples, close friends, and close colleagues can bond over their familiarity with each other's nonverbal behaviors, which creates a shared relational reality that is unique to the relationship.

You've probably heard that more meaning is generated from nonverbal communication than from verbal. Some studies have claimed that 90 percent of our meaning is derived from nonverbal signals, but more recent and reliable findings claim that it is closer to 65 percent (Guerrero & Floyd, 2006). We may rely more on nonverbal signals in situations where verbal and nonverbal messages conflict and in situations where emotional or relational communication is taking place (Hargie, 2011). For example, when someone asks a question and we're not sure about the "angle" they are taking, we may hone in on nonverbal cues to fill in the meaning. For example, the question "What are you doing tonight?" could mean any number of things, but we could rely on posture, tone of voice, and eye contact to see if the person is just curious, suspicious, or hinting that they would like company for the evening. We also put more weight on nonverbal communication when determining a person's credibility. For example, if a classmate delivers a speech in class and her verbal content seems well-researched and unbiased, but her nonverbal communication is poor (her voice is monotone, she avoids eye contact, she fidgets), she will likely not be viewed as credible. Conversely, in some situations, verbal communication might carry more meaning than nonverbal. In interactions where information exchange is the focus, at a briefing at work, for example, verbal communication likely accounts for much more of the meaning generated. Despite this exception, a key principle of nonverbal communication is that it often takes on more meaning in interpersonal and/or emotional exchanges.

Nonverbal Communication influences Others

Nonverbal communication can be used to influence people in a variety of ways, but the most common way is through deception. Deception is typically thought of as the intentional act of altering information to influence another person, which means that it extends beyond lying to include concealing, omitting, or exaggerating information. While verbal communication is to blame for the content of the deception, nonverbal communication partners with the language through deceptive acts to be more convincing. Since most of us intuitively believe that nonverbal communication is more credible than verbal communication, we often intentionally try to control our nonverbal communication when we are engaging in deception. Likewise, we try to evaluate other people's nonverbal communication to determine the veracity of their messages.

Deception obviously has negative connotations, but people engage in deception for many reasons, including to excuse their own mistakes, to be polite to others, or to influence others' behaviors or perceptions. The fact that deception served an important evolutionary purpose helps explain its prevalence among humans today. Species that are capable of deception have a higher survival rate. Other animals engage in nonverbal deception that helps them attract mates, hide from predators, and trap prey (Andersen, 1999). To put it bluntly, the better at deception a creature is, the more likely it is to survive. So, over time, the humans that were better liars were the ones that got their genes passed on. But the fact that lying played a part in our survival as a species doesn't give us a license to lie.

Aside from deception, we can use nonverbal communication to "take the edge off" a critical or unpleasant message in an attempt to influence the reaction of the other person. We may use a comforting touch while delivering a difficult message. We can also use eye contact and proximity to get someone to move or leave an area. For example, hungry diners waiting to snag a first-come-first-serve table in a crowded restaurant send messages to the people who have already eaten and paid that it's time to go. People on competition reality television shows like *Survivor* and *Big Brother* play what they've come to term a "social game." The social aspects of the game involve the manipulation of verbal and nonverbal cues to send strategic messages about oneself in an attempt to influence others. Nonverbal cues such as length of a conversational turn, volume, posture, touch, eye contact, and choices of clothing and accessories can become part of a player's social game strategy. Although reality television isn't a reflection of real life, people still engage in competition and strategically change their communication to influence others, making it important to be aware of how we nonverbally influence others and how they may try to influence us.

Nonverbal Communication Regulates Conversational Flow

Conversational interaction has been likened to a dance, where each person has to make moves and take turns without stepping on the other's toes. Nonverbal communication helps us regulate our conversations so we don't end up constantly interrupting each other or waiting in awkward silences between speaker turns. Pitch, which is a part of vocals, helps us cue others into our conversational intentions. A rising pitch typically indicates a question and a falling pitch indicates the end of a thought or the end of a conversational turn. We can also use a falling pitch to indicate closure, which can be very useful at the end of a speech to signal to the audience that you are finished, which cues the applause and prevents an awkward silence that the speaker ends up filling with "That's it" or "Thank you." We also signal our turn is coming to an end by stopping hand gestures and shifting our eye contact to the person who we think will speak next (Hargie, 2011). Conversely, we can "hold the floor" with nonverbal signals even when we're not exactly sure what we're going to say next. Repeating a hand gesture or using one or more verbal fillers can extend our turn even though we are not verbally communicating at the moment.

Nonverbal Communication Affects Relationships

To successfully relate to other people, we must possess some skill at encoding and decoding nonverbal communication. The nonverbal messages we send and receive influence our relationships in positive and negative ways and can work to bring people together or push them apart. Nonverbal communication in the form of tie signs, immediacy behaviors, and expressions of emotion are just three of many examples that illustrate how nonverbal communication affects our relationships.

Tie signs are nonverbal cues that communicate intimacy and signal the connection between two people. These relational indicators can be objects such as wedding rings or tattoos that are symbolic of another person or the relationship, actions such as sharing the same drinking glass or touch behaviors such as hand-holding (Afifi & Johnson, 2005). Touch behaviors are the most frequently studied tie signs and can communicate much about a relationship based on the area being touched, the length of time, and the intensity of the touch. Kisses and hugs, for example, are considered tie signs, but a kiss on the cheek is different from a kiss on the mouth and a full embrace is different from a half embrace. If you consider yourself a "people watcher," take note of the various tie signs you see people use and what they might say about the relationship.

Immediacy behaviors play a central role in bringing people together and have been identified by some scholars as the most important function of nonverbal communication (Andersen & Andersen, 2005). *Immediacy behaviors* are verbal and nonverbal behaviors that lessen real or perceived physical and psychological distance between communicators and include things like smiling, nodding, making eye contact, and occasionally engaging in social, polite, or professional touch (Comadena, Hunt, & Simonds, 2007). Immediacy behaviors are a good way of creating rapport, or a friendly and positive connection between people. Skilled nonverbal communicators are more likely to be able to create rapport with others due to attention-getting expressiveness, warm initial greetings, and an ability to get "in tune" with others, which conveys empathy (Riggio, 1992). These skills are important to help initiate and maintain relationships.

While verbal communication is our primary tool for solving problems and providing detailed instructions, nonverbal communication is our primary tool for communicating emotions. This makes sense when we remember that nonverbal communication emerged before verbal communication and was the channel through which we expressed anger, fear, and love for thousands of years of human history (Andersen, 1999). Touch and facial expressions are two primary ways we express emotions nonverbally. Love is a primary emotion that we express nonverbally and that forms the basis of our close relationships. Although no single facial expression for love has been identified, it is expressed through prolonged eye contact, close interpersonal distances, increased touch, and increased time spent together, among other things. Given many people's limited emotional vocabulary, nonverbal expressions of emotion are central to our relationships.

"Getting Real"

Teachers and Immediacy Behaviors

A considerable amount of research has been done on teachers' use of immediacy behaviors, which points to the importance of this communication concept in teaching professions (Richmond, Lane, & McCroskey, 2006). Immediacy behaviors are verbal and nonverbal behaviors that lessen real or perceived physical and psychological distance between communicators (Comadena, Hunt, & Simonds, 2007). Specific nonverbal behaviors have been found to increase or decrease perceived levels of immediacy, and such behaviors impact student learning, teacher evaluations, and the teacher-student relationship (Richmond, Lane, & McCroskey, 2006). Even those who do not plan on going into teaching as a career can benefit from learning about immediacy behaviors, as they can also be used productively in other interpersonal contexts such as between a manager and employee, a salesperson and a client, or a politician and constituent. Much of this research in teaching contexts has focused on the relationship between immediacy behaviors and student learning, and research consistently shows that effective use of immediacy behaviors increases learning in various contexts and at various levels. Aside from enhancing student learning, the effective use of immediacy behaviors also leads to better evaluations by students, which can have a direct impact on a teacher's career. While student evaluations of teachers take various factors into consideration, judgments of personality may be formed, as we learned in Chapter 2 after only brief initial impressions. Research shows that students make character assumptions about teachers after only brief exposure to their nonverbal behaviors. Based on nonverbal cues such as frowning, head nodding, pointing, sitting, smiling, standing, strong gestures, weak gestures, and walking, students may or may not evaluate a teacher as open, attentive, confident, dominant, honest, likable, anxious, professional, supportive, or enthusiastic. The following are examples of immediacy behaviors that can be effectively used by teachers:

- Moving around the classroom during class activities, lectures, and discussions (reduces physical distance)
- Keeping the line of sight open between the teacher's body and the students by avoiding or only briefly standing behind lecterns/computer tables or sitting behind a desk while directly interacting with students (reduces physical distance)
- Being expressive and animated with facial expressions, gestures, and voice (demonstrates enthusiasm)
- Smiling (creates a positive and open climate)
- Making frequent eye contact with students (communicates attentiveness and interest)
- Calling students by name (reduces perceived psychological distance)
- Making appropriate self-disclosures to students about personal thoughts, feelings, or experiences (reduces perceived psychological distance, creates open climate)

Teachers who are judged as less immediate are more likely to sit, touch their heads, shake instead of nod their heads, use sarcasm, avoid eye contact, and use less expressive nonverbal behaviors. Finally, immediacy behaviors affect the teacher-student relationship. Immediacy behaviors help establish rapport, which is a personal connection that increases students' investment in the class and material, increases motivation, increases communication between teacher and student, increases liking, creates a sense of mutual respect, reduces challenging behavior by students, and reduces anxiety.

1. Recall a teacher you have had that exhibited effective immediacy behaviors. Recall a teacher you have had that didn't exhibit immediacy behaviors. Make a column for each teacher and note examples of specific behaviors of each. Discuss your list with a classmate and compare and contrast your lists.
2. Think about the teachers that you listed in the previous question. Discuss how their behaviors affected your learning and your relationship.
3. How much should immediacy behaviors, relative to other characteristics such as professionalism, experience, training, and content knowledge, factor into the evaluation of teachers by their students, peers, and supervisors? What, if anything, should schools do to enhance teachers' knowledge of immediacy behaviors?

Nonverbal Communication Expresses Our Identities

Nonverbal communication expresses who we are. Our identities (the groups to which we belong, our cultures, our hobbies, and interests, etc.) are conveyed nonverbally through the way we set up our living and working spaces, the clothes we wear, the way we carry ourselves, and the accents and tones of our voices. Our physical bodies give others impressions about who we are, and some of these features are more under our control than others. Height, for example, has been shown to influence how people are treated and perceived in various contexts. Our level of attractiveness also influences our identities and how people perceive us. Although we can temporarily alter our height or looks—for example, with different shoes or different color contact lenses—we can only permanently alter these features using more invasive and costly measures such as cosmetic surgery. We have more control over some other aspects of nonverbal communication in terms of how we communicate our identities. For example, the way we carry and present ourselves through posture, eye contact, and tone of voice can be altered to present ourselves as warm or distant depending on the context.

Aside from our physical body, *artifacts*, which are the objects and possessions that surround us, also communicate our identities. Examples of artifacts include our clothes, jewelry, and space decorations. In all the previous examples, implicit norms or explicit rules can affect how we nonverbally present ourselves. For example, in a particular workplace it may be a norm (implicit) for people in management positions to dress casually, or it may be a rule (explicit) that different levels of employees wear different uniforms or follow particular dress codes. We can also use nonverbal communication to express identity characteristics that do not match up with who we actually think we are. Through changes to nonverbal signals, a capable person can try to appear helpless, a guilty person can try to appear innocent, or an uninformed person can try to appear credible.

Key Takeaways

- Nonverbal communication is a process of generating meaning using behavior other than words. Nonverbal communication includes vocal elements, which is referred to as *paralanguage* and includes pitch, volume, and rate, and nonvocal elements, which are usually referred to as *body language* and includes gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact, among other things.
- Although verbal communication and nonverbal communication work side by side as part of a larger language system, there are some important differences between the two. They are processed by different hemispheres of the brain, nonverbal communication conveys more emotional and affective meaning than does verbal communication, nonverbal communication isn't governed by an explicit system of rules in the same way that grammar guides verbal communication, and while verbal communication is a uniquely human ability, many creatures including plants, birds, and mammals communicate nonverbally.
- Nonverbal communication operates on the following principles: nonverbal communication typically conveys more meaning than verbal communication, nonverbal communication is more involuntary than verbal communication, nonverbal

communication is often more ambiguous than verbal communication, and nonverbal communication is often more credible than verbal communication.

- Nonverbal communication serves several functions.
- Nonverbal communication affects verbal communication in that it can complement, reinforce, substitute, or contradict verbal messages.
- Nonverbal communication influences others, as it is a key component of deception and can be used to assert dominance or to engage in compliance gaining.
- Nonverbal communication regulates conversational flow, as it provides important cues that signal the beginning and end of conversational turns and facilitates the beginning and end of an interaction.
- Nonverbal communication affects relationships, as it is a primary means through which we communicate emotions, establish social bonds, and engage in relational maintenance.
- Nonverbal communication expresses our identities, as who we are is conveyed through the way we set up our living and working spaces, the clothes we wear, our personal presentation, and the tones in our voices.

Exercises

1. Getting integrated: To better understand nonverbal communication, try to think of an example to

illustrate each of the four principles discussed in the chapter. Be integrative in your approach by including at least one example from an academic, professional, civic, and personal context.

2. When someone sends you a mixed message in which the verbal and nonverbal messages contradict each other, which one do you place more meaning on? Why?
3. Our personal presentation, style of dress, and surroundings such as a dorm room, apartment, car, or office send nonverbal messages about our identities. Analyze some of the nonverbal signals that your personal presentation or environment send. What do they say about who you are? Do they create the impression that you desire?

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4.2 Types of Nonverbal Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Define kinesics.
2. Define haptics.
3. Define vocalics.
4. Define proxemics.
5. Define chronemics.
6. Provide examples of types of nonverbal communication that fall under these categories.
7. Discuss the ways in which personal presentation and environment provide nonverbal cues.

Just as verbal language is broken up into various categories, there are also different types of nonverbal communication. As we learn about each type of nonverbal signal, keep in mind that nonverbals often work in concert with each other, combining to repeat, modify, or contradict the verbal message being sent.

Kinesics

The word kinesics comes from the root word *kinesis*, which means "movement," and refers to the study of hand, arm, body, and face movements. Specifically, this section will outline the use of gestures, head movements and posture, eye contact, and facial expressions as nonverbal communication.

Gestures

Emblems

Many gestures are emblems. Emblems are gestures that have a specific agreed-on meaning. Only a handful of emblematic gestures seem to be universal, for example, a shrug of the shoulders to indicate "I don't know." Most emblems are culturally determined, and they can get you into difficulty if you use them in other countries. In the United States, some emblematic gestures are the thumb-up-and-out hitchhiking sign, the circled thumb and index finger Ok sign, and the "V" for victory sign. However, be careful of using these gestures outside the United States. The thumb-up sign in Iran, for example, is an obscene gesture, and our Ok sign has sexual connotations in Ethiopia and Mexico.

Emblems are gestures that have a specific meaning. In the United States, a thumbs-up can mean "I need a ride" or "OK!"

Kreg Steppe – Thumbs Up – CC BY-SA 2.0.

Illustrators

While emblems can be used as direct substitutions for words, illustrators help emphasize or explain a word. Illustrators are the most common type of gesture and are used to illustrate the verbal message they accompany. For example, you might use hand gestures to indicate the size or shape of an object. Unlike emblems, illustrators do not typically have meaning on their own and are used more subconsciously than emblems. These largely involuntary and seemingly natural gestures flow from us as we speak but vary in terms of intensity and frequency based on context. Although we are never explicitly taught how to use illustrative gestures, we do it automatically. Think about how you still gesture when having an animated conversation on the phone even though the other person can't see you.

Affect Displays

Affect displays show feelings and emotions. Consider how music and sports fans show enthusiasm. It is not uncommon to see people jumping up and down at sports events during a particularly exciting moment in a game. However, there are different norms depending on the sport. It would simply be inappropriate to demonstrate the same nonverbal gestures at a golf or tennis game as a football game.

Regulators

Regulators, as discussed earlier, are gestures that help coordinate the flow of conversation, such as when you shrug your shoulders or wink. Head nods, eye contact/aversion, hand movements, and changes in posture are considered to be turn-taking cues in conversation. Individuals may sit back when listening but shift forward to indicate a desire to speak. Eye contact shifts frequently during a conversation to indicate listening or a desire to speak. Head nods are used as a sign of listening and often indicate that the speaker should continue speaking.

Head Movements and Posture

Head movements and posture are grouped together because they are often both used to acknowledge others and communicate interest or attentiveness. In terms of head movements, a head nod is a universal sign of acknowledgment in cultures where the formal bow is no longer used as a greeting. In these cases, the head nod essentially serves as an abbreviated bow. An innate and universal head movement is the head shake back and forth to signal "no."

This nonverbal signal begins at birth, even before a baby has the ability to know that it has a corresponding meaning. Babies shake their heads from side to side to reject their mother's breast and later shake their heads to reject attempts to spoon-feed (Pease & Pease, 2004). This biologically based movement then sticks with us to be a recognizable signal for "no." We also move our heads to indicate interest. For example, a head up typically indicates an engaged or neutral attitude, a head tilt indicates interest and is an innate submission gesture that exposes the neck and subconsciously makes people feel more trusting of us, and a head down signals a negative or aggressive attitude (Pease & Pease, 2004).

There are four general human postures: standing, sitting, squatting, and lying down (Hargie, 2011). Within each of these postures, there are many variations, and when combined with particular gestures or other nonverbal cues they can express many different meanings. Most of our communication occurs while we are standing or sitting. One interesting standing posture involves putting our hands on our hips and is a nonverbal cue that we use subconsciously to make us look bigger and show assertiveness. When the elbows are pointed out, this prevents others from getting past us as easily and is a sign of attempted dominance or a gesture that says we're ready for action. In terms of sitting, leaning back shows informality and indifference, straddling a chair is a sign of dominance (but also some insecurity because the person is protecting the vulnerable front part of his or her body), and leaning forward shows interest and attentiveness (Pease & Pease, 2004).

Eye Contact

We also communicate through eye behaviors, primarily eye contact. While eye behaviors are often studied under the category of kinesics, they have their own branch of nonverbal studies called oculesics, which comes from the Latin word *oculus*, meaning "eye."

The face and eyes are the main point of focus during communication, and along with our ears our eyes take in most of the communicative information around us. The saying "The eyes are the window to the soul" is actually accurate in terms of where people typically think others are "located," which is right behind the eyes (Andersen, 1999). Certain eye behaviors have become tied to personality traits or emotional states, as illustrated in phrases like "hungry eyes," "evil eyes," and "bedroom eyes." To better understand oculesics, we will discuss the characteristics and functions of eye contact and pupil dilation.

Eye contact serves several communicative functions ranging from regulating and monitoring interaction, to conveying information, to establishing interpersonal connections. In terms of regulating communication, we use eye contact to signal to others that we are ready to speak or we use it to cue others to speak. I'm sure we've all been in that awkward situation where a teacher asks a question, no one else offers a response, and he or she looks directly at us as if to say, "What do you think?" In that case, the teacher's eye contact is used to cue us to respond. During an interaction, eye contact also changes as we shift from speaker to listener. US Americans typically shift eye contact while speaking—looking away from the listener and then looking back at his or her face every few seconds. Toward the end of our speaking turn, we make more direct eye contact with our listener to indicate that we are finishing up. While listening, we tend to make more sustained eye contact, not glancing away as regularly as we do while speaking (Martin & Nakayama, 2010).

Our eyes monitor interaction by bringing in the visual information we need to interpret people's movements, gestures, and eye contact. A speaker can use his or her eye contact to determine if an audience is engaged, confused, or bored and then adapt his or her message accordingly. Our eyes also send information to others. People know not to interrupt when we are in deep thought because we naturally look away from others when we are processing information. Making eye contact with others also communicates that we are paying attention and are interested in what another person is saying. Eye contact is a key part of active listening.

Eye contact can also be used to intimidate others. We have social norms about how much eye contact we make with people, and those norms vary depending on the setting and the person. Staring at another person in some contexts could communicate intimidation, while in other contexts it could communicate flirtation. As we learned, eye contact is a key immediacy behavior, and it signals to others that we are available for communication. Once communication begins, if it does, eye contact helps establish rapport or connection. We can also use our eye contact to signal that we do not want to make a connection with others. For example, in a public setting like an airport or a gym where people often make small talk, we can avoid making eye contact with others to indicate that we do not want to engage in small talk with strangers. Another person could use eye contact to try to coax you into speaking, though. For example, when one person continues to stare at another person who is not reciprocating eye contact, the person avoiding eye contact might eventually give in, become curious, or become irritated and say, “Can I help you with something?” As you can see, eye contact sends and receives important communicative messages that help us interpret others’ behaviors, convey information about our thoughts and feelings, and facilitate or impede rapport or connection.

Facial Expressions

Our faces are the most expressive part of our bodies. Think of how photos are often intended to capture a particular expression “in a flash” to preserve for later viewing. Even though a photo is a snapshot in time, we can still interpret much meaning from a human face caught in a moment of expression, and basic facial expressions are recognizable by humans all over the world. Much research has supported the universality of a core group of facial expressions: happiness, sadness, fear, anger, and disgust. The first four are especially identifiable across cultures (Andersen, 1999). However, the triggers for these expressions and the cultural and social norms that influence their displays are still culturally diverse. If you've spent much time with babies you know that they're capable of expressing all these emotions. Getting to see the pure and innate expressions of joy and surprise on a baby's face is what makes playing peek-a-boo so entertaining for adults. As we get older, we learn and begin to follow display rules for facial expressions and other signals of emotion and also learn to better control our emotional expression based on the norms of our culture.

Smiles are powerful communicative signals and, as you'll recall, are a key immediacy behavior. Although facial expressions are typically viewed as innate and several are universally recognizable, they are not always connected to an emotional or internal biological stimulus; they can actually serve a more social purpose. For example, most of the smiles we produce are primarily made for others and are not just an involuntary reflection of an internal emotional state (Andersen, 1999). These social smiles, however, are slightly but perceptibly different from more genuine smiles. People generally perceive smiles as more genuine when the other person smiles "with their eyes." This particular type of smile is difficult if not impossible to fake because the muscles around the eye that are activated when we spontaneously or genuinely smile are not under our voluntary control. It is the involuntary and spontaneous contraction of these muscles that moves the skin around our cheeks, eyes, and nose to create a smile that's distinct from a fake or polite smile (Evans, 2001). People are able to distinguish the difference between these smiles, which is why photographers often engage in cheesy joking with adults or use props with children to induce a genuine smile before they snap a picture.

Our faces are the most expressive part of our body and can communicate an array of different emotions.

Elif Ayiter – Facial Expression Test – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Haptics

Haptics is the study of touch as a form of nonverbal communication. Touch is used in many ways in our daily lives, such as greeting, comfort, affection, task accomplishment, and control. You may have engaged in a few or all of these behaviors today. If you shook hands with someone, hugged a friend, kissed your romantic partner, then you used touch to greet and give affection. If you visited a salon to have your hair cut, then you were touched with the purpose of task accomplishment. You may have encountered a friend who was upset and patted the friend to ease the pain and provide comfort. Finally, you may recall your parents or guardians putting an arm around your shoulder to help you walk faster if there was a need to hurry you along. In this case, your parent/guardian was using touch for control.

Several factors impact how touch is perceived. These factors are duration, frequency, and intensity. Duration is how long touch endures. Frequency is how often touch is used, and intensity is the amount of pressure applied. These factors influence how individuals are evaluated in social interactions. For example, researchers state, "a handshake preceding social interactions positively influenced the way individuals evaluated the social interaction partners and their interest in further interactions while reversing the impact of negative impressions" (Dolcos, Sung, Argo, Flor-Henry, Dolcos, F., 2012). This research demonstrates that individuals must understand when it is appropriate to shake hands and that there are negative consequences for failing to do so. Importantly, an appropriately timed handshake can erase the negative effects of any mistakes one might make in an initial interaction!

Touch is a form of communication that can be used to initiate, regulate, and maintain relationships. It is a very powerful form of communication that can be used to communicate messages ranging from comfort to power. Duration, frequency, and intensity of touch can be used to convey liking, attraction, or dominance. Touch can be helpful or harmful and must be used appropriately to have effective relationships with family, friends, and romantic partners. Consider that inappropriate touch can convey romantic intentions where no romance exists. Conversely, fear can be instilled through touch. Touch is a powerful interpersonal tool along with voice and body movement.

Vocalics

We learned earlier that *paralanguage* refers to the vocalized but nonverbal parts of a message. Vocalics is the study of paralanguage, which includes the vocal qualities that go along with verbal messages.

Pitch helps convey meaning, regulate conversational flow, and communicate the intensity of a message. Even babies recognize a sentence with a higher pitched ending as a question. We also learn that greetings have a rising emphasis and farewells have falling emphasis. Of course, no one ever tells us these things explicitly; we learn them through observation and practice. We do not pick up on some more subtle and/or complex patterns of paralanguage involving pitch until we are older. Children, for example, have a difficult time perceiving sarcasm, which is usually conveyed through paralinguistic characteristics like pitch and tone rather than the actual words being spoken.

Paralanguage provides important context for the verbal content of speech. For example, volume helps communicate intensity. A louder voice is usually thought of as more intense, although a soft voice combined with a certain tone and facial expression can be just as intense. We typically adjust our volume based on our setting, the distance between people, and the relationship. In our age of computer-mediated communication, TYPING IN ALL CAPS is usually equated with yelling. A voice at a low volume or a whisper can be very appropriate when sending a covert message or flirting with a romantic partner, but it wouldn't enhance a person's credibility if used during a professional presentation.

Tempo refers to the rate at which one speaks. Changes in tempo can reflect emotions such as excitement or anger, physical wellbeing, or energy level. For instance, when telling a friend a particularly intense or exciting story, you may increase the rate of your words. *Rhythm* refers to the pattern used when speaking. Consider the speaking rhythm of a "surfer dude" or a "valley girl." One of the most well-known forms of rhythm used in a speech was Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I have a Dream" speech. More recently, the speaking rhythm of President's Obama and Trump are easily identifiable when imitated by comedians.

Our tone of voice can be controlled somewhat with pitch, volume, and emphasis, but each voice has a distinct quality known as a vocal signature. Voices vary in terms of resonance, pitch, and tone, and some voices are more pleasing than others. People typically find pleasing voices that employ vocal variety and are not monotone, are lower pitched (particularly for males), and do not exhibit particular regional accents. Think about people who have very distinct voices. Whether they are a public figure like President Bill Clinton, a celebrity like Snooki from the *Jersey Shore*, or a fictional character like Peter Griffin from *Family Guy*, some people's voices stick with us and make a favorable or unfavorable impression.

The following is a list of the various communicative functions of vocalics:

- **Repetition.** Vocalic cues reinforce other verbal and nonverbal cues (e.g., saying "I'm not sure" with an uncertain tone).
- **Complementing.** Vocalic cues elaborate on or modify verbal and nonverbal meaning (e.g., the pitch and volume used to say "I love sweet potatoes" would add context to the meaning of the sentence, such as the degree to which the person loves sweet potatoes or the use of sarcasm).
- **Accenting.** Vocalic cues allow us to emphasize particular parts of a message, which helps determine meaning (e.g., "*She* is my friend," or "She is *my* friend," or "She is my *friend*").
- **Substituting.** Vocalic cues can take the place of other verbal or nonverbal cues (e.g., saying "uh huh" instead of "I am listening and understand what you're saying").
- **Regulating.** Vocalic cues help regulate the flow of conversations (e.g., falling pitch and slowing rate of speaking usually indicate the end of a speaking turn).
- **Contradicting.** Vocalic cues may contradict other verbal or nonverbal signals (e.g., a person could say "I'm fine" in a quick, short tone that indicates otherwise).

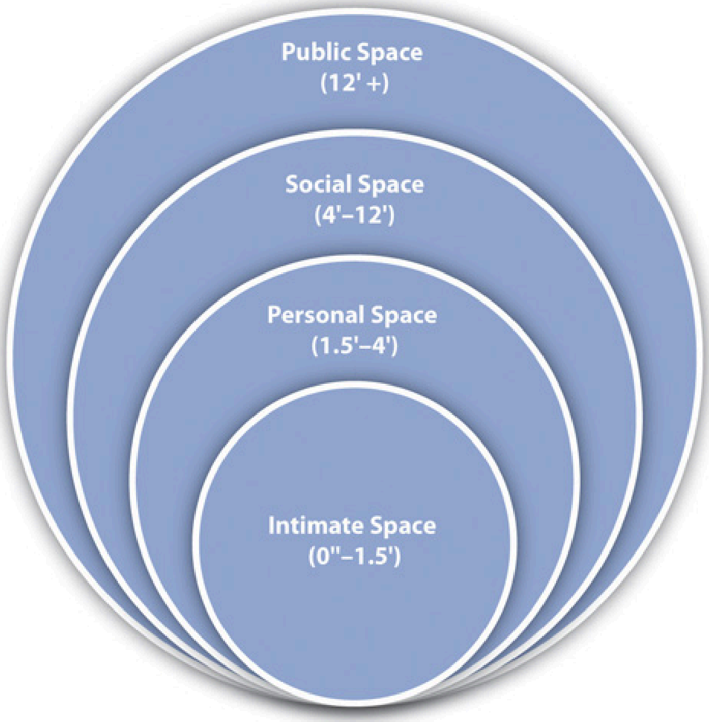
Proxemics

Proxemics refers to the study of how space and distance influence communication. We only need look at the ways in which space shows up in common metaphors to see that space, communication, and relationships are closely related. For example, when we are content with and attracted to someone, we say we are "close" to him or her. When we lose connection with someone, we may say he or she is "distant." In general, space influences how people communicate and behave. Smaller spaces with a higher density of people often lead to breaches of our personal space bubbles. If this is a setting in which this type of density is expected beforehand, like at a crowded concert or on a train during rush hour, then we make various communicative adjustments to manage the space issue. Unexpected breaches of personal space can lead to negative reactions, especially if we feel someone has violated our space voluntarily, meaning that a crowding situation didn't force them into our space.

Proxemic Distances

We all have varying definitions of what our "personal space" is, and these definitions are contextual and depend on the situation and the relationship. Although our bubbles are invisible, people are socialized into the norms of personal space within their cultural group. Scholars have identified four zones for US Americans, which are public, social, personal, and intimate distance (Hall, 1968). The zones are more elliptical than circular, taking up more space in our front, where our line of sight is, than at our side or back where we can't monitor what people are doing. You can see how these zones relate to each other and to the individual in Figure 4.1 "Proxemic Zones of Personal Space". Even within a particular zone, interactions may differ depending on whether someone is in the outer or inner part of the zone.

Figure 4.1 Proxemic Zones of Personal Space



Public Space (12 Feet or More)

Public and social zones refer to the space four or more feet away from our body, and the communication that typically occurs in these zones is formal and not intimate. Public space starts about twelve feet from a person and extends out from there. This is the least personal of the four zones and would typically be used when a person is engaging in a formal speech and is removed from the audience to allow the audience to see or when a high-profile or powerful person like a celebrity or executive maintains such a distance as a sign of power or for safety and security reasons. In terms of regular interaction, we are often not obligated or expected to acknowledge or interact with people who enter our public zone. It would be difficult to have a deep conversation with someone at this level because you have to speak louder and don't have the physical closeness that is often needed to promote emotional closeness and/or establish rapport.

Social Space (4–12 Feet)

Communication that occurs in the social zone, which is four to twelve feet away from our body, is typically in the context of professional or casual interactions. This distance is preferred in many professional settings because it reduces the suspicion of any impropriety. The expression "keep someone at an arm's length" means that someone is kept out of the personal space and kept in the social/professional space. If two people held up their arms and stood so just the tips of their fingers were touching, they would be around four feet away from each other, which is perceived as a safe distance because the possibility for intentional or unintentional touching doesn't exist. It is also possible to have people in the outer portion of our social zone but not feel obligated to interact with them, but when people come much closer than six feet to us we often feel obligated to at least acknowledge their presence. In many typically sized classrooms, much of your audience for a speech will actually be in your social zone rather than your public zone, which is actually beneficial because it helps you establish a better connection with them. Students in large lecture classes should consider sitting within the social zone of the professor, since students who sit within this zone are more likely to be remembered by the professor, be acknowledged in class, and retain more information because they are close enough to take in important nonverbal and visual cues. Students who talk to the professor after class typically stand about four to five feet away when they speak, which keeps them in the outer part of the social zone, typical for professional interactions. When students have more personal information to discuss, they will come closer, which brings them into the inner part of the social zone.

Personal Space (1.5–4 Feet)

Personal and intimate zones refer to the space that starts at our physical body and extends four feet. These zones are reserved for friends, close acquaintances, and significant others. Much of our communication occurs in the personal zone, which is what we typically think of as our "personal space bubble" and extends from 1.5 feet to 4 feet away from our body. Even though we are getting closer to the physical body of another person, we may use verbal communication at this point to signal that our presence in this zone is friendly and not intimate. Even people who know each other could be uncomfortable spending too much time in this zone unnecessarily. This zone is broken up into two subzones, which helps us negotiate close interactions with people we may not be close to interpersonally (McKay, Davis, & Fanning, 1995). The outer-personal zone extends from 2.5 feet to 4 feet and is useful for conversations that need to be private but that occur between people who are not interpersonally close. This zone allows for relatively intimate communication but doesn't convey the intimacy that a closer distance would, which can be beneficial in professional settings. The inner-personal zone extends from 1.5 feet to 2.5 feet and is a space reserved for communication with people we are interpersonally close to or trying to get to know. In this subzone, we can easily touch the other person as we talk to them, briefly placing a hand on his or her arm or engaging in other light social touching that facilitates conversation, self-disclosure, and feelings of closeness.

Intimate Space

As we breach the invisible line that is 1.5 feet from our body, we enter the intimate zone, which is reserved for only the closest friends, family, and romantic/intimate partners. It is impossible to completely ignore people when they are in this space, even if we are trying to pretend that we're ignoring them. A breach of this space can be comforting in some contexts and annoying or frightening in others. We need regular human contact that isn't just verbal but also physical. Being close to someone and feeling their physical presence can be very comforting when words fail. There are also social norms regarding the amount of this type of closeness that can be displayed in public, as some people get uncomfortable even seeing others interacting in the intimate zone. While some people are comfortable engaging in or watching others engage in PDAs (public displays of affection) others are not.

So what happens when our space is violated? Although these zones are well established in research for personal space preferences of US Americans, individuals vary in terms of their reactions to people entering certain zones, and determining what constitutes a "violation" of space is subjective and contextual. For example, another person's presence in our social or public zones doesn't typically arouse suspicion or negative physical or communicative reactions, but it could in some situations or with certain people. However, many situations lead to our personal and intimate space being breached by others against our will, and these breaches are more likely to be upsetting, even when they are expected. We've all had to get into a crowded elevator or wait in a long line. In such situations, we may rely on some verbal communication to reduce immediacy and indicate that we are not interested in closeness and are aware that a breach has occurred. People make comments about the crowd, saying, "We're really packed in here like sardines," or use humor to indicate that they are pleasant and well adjusted and uncomfortable with the breach like any "normal" person would be. Interestingly, as we will learn in our discussion of territoriality, we do not often use verbal communication to defend our personal space during regular interactions. Instead, we rely on more nonverbal communication like moving, crossing our arms, or avoiding eye contact to deal with breaches of space.

Territoriality

Territoriality is an innate drive to take up and defend spaces. This drive is shared by many creatures and entities, ranging from packs of animals to individual humans to nations. Whether it's a gang territory, a neighborhood claimed by a particular salesperson, your preferred place to sit in a restaurant, your usual desk in the classroom, or the seat you've marked to save while getting concessions at a sporting event, we claim certain spaces as our own. There are three main divisions for territory: primary, secondary, and public (Hargie, 2011). Sometimes our claim to a space is official. These spaces are known as our primary territories because they are marked or understood to be exclusively ours and under our control. A person's house, yard, room, desk, side of the bed, or shelf in the medicine cabinet could be considered primary territories.

Secondary territories don't belong to us and aren't exclusively under our control, but they are associated with us, which may lead us to assume that the space will be open and available to us when we need it without us taking any further steps to reserve it. This happens in classrooms regularly. Students often sit at the same desk or at least the same general area as they did on the first day of class. There may be some small adjustments during the first couple of weeks, but by a month into the semester, students do not typically move often voluntarily. When someone else takes a student's regular desk, they are typically annoyed.

Public territories are open to all people. People are allowed to mark public territory and use it for a limited period of time, but space is often up for grabs, which makes public space difficult to manage for some people and can lead to conflict. To avoid this type of situation, people use a variety of objects that are typically recognized by others as nonverbal cues that mark a place as temporarily reserved—for example, jackets, bags, papers, or a drink. There is some ambiguity in the use of markers, though. A half-empty cup of coffee may be seen as trash and thrown away, which would be an annoying surprise to a person who left it to mark his or her table while visiting the restroom. One scholar's informal observations revealed that a full drink sitting on a table could reserve a space in a university cafeteria for more than an hour, but a cup only half full usually only worked as a marker of territory for less than ten minutes. People have to decide how much value they want their marker to have. Obviously, leaving a laptop on a table indicates that the table is occupied, but it could also lead to the laptop getting stolen. A pencil, on the other hand, could just be moved out of the way and the space usurped.

Chronemics

Chronemics is the study of how we refer to and perceive time. Cultures vary widely in their *time orientation*, although context can also play a major role as well. "Time is money" is a common saying across cultures that display a high value for time. In social contexts, time often reveals social status and power. Who are you willing to wait for? A doctor for an office visit when you are sick? A potential employer for a job interview? Your significant other or children?

Some Mexican American friends may invite you to a barbecue at 8 p.m., but when you arrive you are the first guest, because it is understood that the gathering actually doesn't start until after 9 p.m. Similarly in France, an 8 p.m. party invitation would be understood to indicate you should arrive around 8:30, but in Sweden 8 p.m. means 8 p.m., and latecomers may not be welcome.

In the United States, we perceive time as linear, flowing along in a straight line. We did one task, we're doing another task now, and we are planning on doing something else later. In *monochronic* time orientation, time is a commodity. Being punctual, completing tasks, and keeping schedules are valued and may be more important than building or maintaining personal relationships.

In *polychronic* time orientation, time is more holistic and circular. It is expected that many events happen at once, and things get done because of personal relationships, not in spite of personal relationships. The Euro Railways trains in Germany are famous for departing and arriving according to the schedule no matter what. In contrast, if you take the train in Argentina, you'll find that the schedule is more of an approximation of when the train will leave or arrive. Engineers, conductors, and even passengers influence the schedule, not a clock.

Personal Presentation and Environment

Personal presentation involves two components: our physical characteristics and the artifacts with which we adorn and surround ourselves. Physical characteristics include body shape, height, weight, attractiveness, and other physical features of our bodies. We do not have as much control over how these nonverbal cues are encoded as we do with many other aspects of nonverbal communication. As Chapter 2 "Communication and Perception" noted, these characteristics play a large role in initial impression formation even though we know we "shouldn't judge a book by its cover." Although ideals of attractiveness vary among cultures and individuals, research consistently indicates that people who are deemed attractive based on physical characteristics have distinct advantages in many aspects of life. This fact, along with media images that project often unrealistic ideals of beauty, has contributed to booming health and beauty, dieting, gym, and plastic surgery industries. While there have been some controversial reality shows that seek to transform people's physical characteristics, like *Extreme Makeover*, *The Swan*, and *The Biggest Loser*, the relative ease with which we can change the artifacts that send nonverbal cues about us has led to many more style and space makeover shows.

Clothes, jewelry, visible body art, hairstyles, and other political, social, and cultural symbols send messages to others about who we are. In the United States, body piercings and tattoos have been shifting from subcultural to mainstream over the past few decades. The physical location, size, and number of tattoos and piercings play a large role in whether or not they are deemed appropriate for different contexts, and many people with tattoos and/or piercings make conscious choices about when and where they display their body art. Hair also sends messages whether it is on our heads or our bodies. Men with short hair are generally judged to be more conservative than men with long hair. Whether a person has a part in their hair, a mohawk, faux-hawk, ponytail, curls, or bright pink hair also sends nonverbal signals to others.

Jewelry can also send messages with varying degrees of direct meaning. A ring on the "ring finger" of a person's left hand typically indicates that they are married or in an otherwise committed relationship. A thumb ring or a right-hand ring on the "ring finger" doesn't send such a direct message. People also adorn their clothes, body, or belongings with religious or cultural symbols, like a cross to indicate a person's Christian faith or a rainbow flag to indicate that a person is gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, or an ally to one or more of those groups. Rubber bracelets, which were a popular form of social cause marketing for a time, indicated if people identified with the "Livestrong" movement or supported breast cancer awareness and research (among a few causes).

The objects that surround us send nonverbal cues that may influence how people perceive us. What impression does a messy, crowded office make?

Phil Stripling – My desk – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Last, the environment in which we interact affects our verbal and nonverbal communication. This is included because we can often manipulate the nonverbal environment similar to how we would manipulate our gestures or tone of voice to suit our communicative needs. The books that we display on our coffee table, the magazines a doctor keeps in his or her waiting room, the placement of fresh flowers in a foyer, or a piece of mint chocolate on a hotel bed pillow all send particular messages and can easily be changed. The placement of objects and furniture in a physical space can help create a formal, distant, friendly, or intimate climate. In terms of formality, we can use nonverbal communication to convey dominance and status, which helps define and negotiate power and roles within relationships. Fancy cars and expensive watches can serve as symbols that distinguish a CEO from an entry-level employee. A room with soft lighting, a small fountain that creates ambient sounds of water flowing, and a comfy chair can help facilitate interactions between a therapist and a patient. In summary, whether we know it or not, our physical characteristics and the artifacts that surround us communicate much.

"Getting Plugged In"

Avatars

Avatars are computer-generated images that represent users in online environments or are created to interact with users in online and offline situations. Avatars can be created in the likeness of humans, animals, aliens, or other nonhuman creatures (Allmendinger, 2010). Avatars vary in terms of functionality and technical sophistication and can include stationary pictures like buddy icons, cartoonish but humanlike animations like a Mii character on the Wii, or very humanlike animations designed to teach or assist people in virtual environments. More recently, 3-D holographic avatars have been put to work helping travelers at airports in Paris and New York (Strunksy, 2012; Tecca, 2012). Research has shown, though, that humanlike avatars influence people even when they are not sophisticated in terms of functionality and adaptability (Baylor, 2011). Avatars are especially motivating and influential when they are similar to the observer or user but more closely represent the person's ideal self. Appearance has been noted as one of the most important attributes of an avatar designed to influence or motivate. Attractiveness, coolness (in terms of clothing and hairstyle), and age were shown to be factors that increase or decrease the influence an avatar has over users (Baylor, 2011).

People also create their own avatars as self-representations in a variety of online environments ranging from online role-playing games like *World of Warcraft* and *Second Life* to some online learning management systems used by colleges and universities. Research shows that the line between reality and virtual reality can become blurry when it comes to avatar design and identification. This can become even more pronounced when we consider that some users, especially of online role-playing games, spend about twenty hours a week as their avatar.

Avatars do more than represent people in online worlds; they also affect their behaviors offline. For example, one study found that people who watched an avatar that looked like them exercising and losing weight in an online environment exercised more and ate healthier in the real world (Fox & Bailenson, 2009). Seeing an older version of them online led participants to form a more concrete social and psychological connection with their future selves, which led them to invest more money in a retirement account. People's actions online also mirror the expectations for certain physical characteristics, even when the user doesn't exhibit those characteristics and didn't get to choose them for his or her avatar. For example, experimental research showed that people using more attractive avatars were more extroverted and friendly than those with less attractive avatars, which is also a nonverbal communication pattern that exists among real people. In summary, people have the ability to self-select physical characteristics and personal presentation for their avatars in a way that they can't in their real life. People come to see their avatars as part of themselves, which opens the possibility for avatars to affect users' online and offline communication (Kim, Lee, & Kang, 2012).

1. Describe an avatar that you have created for yourself. What led you to construct the avatar the way you did, and how do you think your choices reflect your typical nonverbal self-presentation? If you haven't ever constructed an avatar, what would you make your avatar look like and why?
2. In 2009, a man in Japan became the first human to marry an avatar (that we know of). Although he claims that his avatar is better than any human girlfriend, he has been criticized as being out of touch with reality. You can read more about this human-avatar union through the following link: http://articles.cnn.com/2009-12-16/world/japan.virtual.wedding_1_virtual-world-sal-marry?_s=PM:WORLD. Do you think the boundaries between human reality and avatar fantasy will continue to fade as we become a more technologically fused world? How do you feel about interacting more with avatars in customer service situations like the airport avatar mentioned above? What do you think about having avatars as mentors, role models, or teachers?

Key Takeaways

- *Kinesics* refers to body movements and posture and includes the following components:
    - Gestures are arm and hand movements and

include adaptors like clicking a pen or scratching your face, emblems like a thumbs-up to say "OK," and illustrators like bouncing your hand along with the rhythm of your speaking.
    - Head movements and posture include the orientation of movements of our head and the orientation and positioning of our body and the various meanings they send. Head movements such as nodding can indicate agreement, disagreement, and interest, among other things. Posture can indicate assertiveness, defensiveness, interest, readiness, or intimidation, among other things.
    - Eye contact is studied under the category of oculesics and specifically refers to eye contact with another person's face, head, and eyes and the patterns of looking away and back at the other person during interaction. Eye contact provides turn-taking signals, signals when we are engaged in cognitive activity, and helps establish rapport and connection, among other things.
    - Facial expressions refer to the use of the forehead, brow, and facial muscles around the nose and mouth to convey meaning. Facial expressions can convey happiness, sadness, fear, anger, and other emotions.
- *Haptics* refers to touch behaviors that convey meaning during interactions. Touch operates at many levels, including functional-professional, social-polite, friendship-warmth, and love-intimacy.

- *Vocalics* refers to the vocalized but not verbal aspects of nonverbal communication, including our speaking rate, pitch, volume, tone of voice, and vocal quality. These qualities, also known as paralanguage, reinforce the meaning of verbal communication, allow us to emphasize particular parts of a message, or can contradict verbal messages.
- *Proxemics* refers to the use of space and distance within communication. US Americans, in general, have four zones that constitute our personal space: the public zone (12 or more feet from our body), social zone (4–12 feet from our body), the personal zone (1.5–4 feet from our body), and the intimate zone (from body contact to 1.5 feet away). Proxemics also studies territoriality, or how people take up and defend personal space.
- *Chronemics* refers the study of how time affects communication and includes how different time cycles affect our communication, including the differences between people who are past or future oriented and cultural perspectives on time as fixed and measured (monochronic) or fluid and adaptable (polychronic).
- *Personal presentation and environment* refers to how the objects we adorn ourselves and our surroundings with, referred to as *artifacts*, provide nonverbal cues that others make meaning from and how our physical environment—for example, the layout of a room and seating positions and arrangements—influences communication.

Exercises

1. Provide some examples of how eye contact plays a role in your communication throughout the day.
2. One of the key functions of vocalics is to add emphasis to our verbal messages to influence the meaning. Provide a meaning for each of the following statements based on which word is emphasized: "*She* is my friend." "She is *my* friend." "She is my *friend*."
3. Getting integrated: Many people do not think of time as an important part of our nonverbal communication. Provide an example of how chronemics sends nonverbal messages in academic settings, professional settings, and personal settings.

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4.3 Nonverbal Communication Competence

Learning Objectives

1. Identify and employ strategies for improving competence with sending nonverbal messages.
2. Identify and employ strategies for improving competence with interpreting nonverbal messages.

As we age, we internalize social and cultural norms related to sending (encoding) and interpreting (decoding) nonverbal communication. In terms of sending, the tendency of children to send unmonitored nonverbal signals reduces as we get older and begin to monitor and perhaps censor or mask them (Andersen, 1999). Likewise, as we become more experienced communicators we tend to think that we become better at interpreting nonverbal messages. In this section we will discuss some strategies for effectively encoding and decoding nonverbal messages. As we've already learned, we receive little, if any, official instruction in nonverbal communication, but you can think of this chapter as a training manual to help improve your own nonverbal communication competence. As with all aspects of communication, improving your nonverbal communication takes commitment and continued effort. However, research shows that education and training in nonverbal communication can lead to quick gains in knowledge and skill (Riggio, 1992). Additionally, once the initial effort is put into improving your nonverbal encoding and decoding skills and those new skills are put into practice, people are encouraged by the positive reactions from others. Remember that people enjoy interacting with others who are skilled at nonverbal encoding and decoding, which will be evident in their reactions, providing further motivation and encouragement to hone your skills.

Guidelines for Sending Nonverbal Messages

As is stressed in chapter 2, first impressions matter. Nonverbal cues account for much of the content from which we form initial impressions, so it’s important to know that people make judgments about our identities and skills after only brief exposure. Our competence regarding and awareness of nonverbal communication can help determine how an interaction will proceed and, in fact, whether it will take place at all. People who are skilled at encoding nonverbal messages are more favorably evaluated after initial encounters. This is likely due to the fact that people who are more nonverbally expressive are also more attention getting and engaging and make people feel more welcome and warm due to increased immediacy behaviors, all of which enhance perceptions of charisma.

People who are more nonverbally expressive typically form more positive initial impressions, because expressivity in the form of immediacy behaviors is attention getting and welcoming.

Understand That Nonverbal Communication Is Multichannel

Be aware of the multichannel nature of nonverbal communication. We rarely send a nonverbal message in isolation. For example, a posture may be combined with a touch or eye behavior to create what is called a nonverbal cluster (Pease & Pease, 2004). *Nonverbal congruence* refers to consistency among different nonverbal expressions within a cluster. Congruent nonverbal communication is more credible and effective than ambiguous or conflicting nonverbal cues. Even though you may intend for your nonverbal messages to be congruent, they could still be decoded in a way that doesn't match up with your intent, especially since nonverbal expressions vary in terms of their degree of conscious encoding. In this sense, the multichannel nature of nonverbal communication creates the potential of both increased credibility and increased ambiguity.

When we become more aware of the messages we are sending, we can monitor for nonverbal signals that are incongruent with other messages or may be perceived as such. If a student is talking to his professor about his performance in the class and concerns about his grade, the professor may lean forward and nod, encoding a combination of a body orientation and head movement that conveys attention. If the professor, however, regularly breaks off eye contact and looks anxiously at her office door, then she is sending a message that could be perceived as disinterest, which is incongruent with the overall message of care and concern she probably wants to encode. Increasing our awareness of the multiple channels through which we send nonverbal cues can help us make our signals more congruent in the moment.

Understand That Nonverbal Communication Affects Our Interactions

Nonverbal communication affects our own and others' behaviors and communication. Changing our nonverbal signals can affect our thoughts and emotions. Knowing this allows us to have more control over the trajectory of our communication, possibly allowing us to intervene in a negative cycle. For example, if you are waiting in line to get your driver's license renewed and the agents in front of you are moving slower than you'd like and the man in front of you doesn't have his materials organized and is asking unnecessary questions, you might start to exhibit nonverbal clusters that signal frustration. You might cross your arms, a closing-off gesture, and combine that with wrapping your fingers tightly around one bicep and occasionally squeezing, which is a self-touch adaptor that results from anxiety and stress. The longer you stand like that, the more frustrated and defensive you will become, because that nonverbal cluster reinforces and heightens your feelings. Increased awareness about these cycles can help you make conscious moves to change your nonverbal communication and, subsequently, your cognitive and emotional states (McKay, Davis, & Fanning, 1995).

As your nonverbal encoding competence increases, you can strategically manipulate your behaviors. During my years as a restaurant server I got pretty good at knowing what tables to engage with and "schmooze" a little more to get a better tip. Restaurant servers, bartenders, car salespeople, realtors, exotic dancers, and many others who work in a service or sales capacity know that part of "sealing the deal" is making people feel liked, valued, and important. The strategic use of nonverbal communication to convey these messages is largely accepted and expected in our society, and as customers or patrons, we often play along because it feels good in the moment to think that the other person actually cares about us. Using nonverbals that are intentionally deceptive and misleading can have negative consequences and cross the line into unethical communication.

Understand How Nonverbal Communication Creates Rapport

Humans have evolved an innate urge to mirror each other's nonverbal behavior, and although we aren't often aware of it, this urge influences our behavior daily (Pease & Pease, 2004). Think, for example, about how people "fall into formation" when waiting in a line. Our nonverbal communication works to create an unspoken and subconscious cooperation, as people move and behave in similar ways. When one person leans to the left the next person in line may also lean to the left, and this shift in posture may continue all the way down the line to the end until someone else makes another movement and the whole line shifts again. This phenomenon is known as *mirroring*, which refers to the often subconscious practice of using nonverbal cues in a way that match those of others around us. Mirroring sends implicit messages to others that say, "Look! I'm just like you." Mirroring evolved as an important social function in that it allowed early humans to more easily fit in with larger groups. Logically, early humans who were more successful at mirroring were more likely to secure food, shelter, and security and therefore passed that genetic disposition on down the line to us.

Mirroring has long been suggested as an interview strategy to get a job offer.

<iframe width="560″ height="315″ src="https://www.youtube.com/embed/ZwX9L2NC4iY" title="YouTube video player" frameborder="0″ allow="accelerometer; autoplay; clipboard-write; encrypted-media; gyroscope; picture-in-picture" allowfullscreen></iframe>

Understand How Nonverbal Communication Regulates Conversations

The ability to encode appropriate turn-taking signals can help ensure that we can hold the floor when needed in a conversation or work our way into a conversation smoothly, without inappropriately interrupting someone or otherwise being seen as rude. People with nonverbal encoding competence are typically more "in control" of conversations. This regulating function can be useful in initial encounters when we are trying to learn more about another person and in situations where status differentials are present or compliance gaining or dominance are goals. Although close friends, family, and relational partners can sometimes be an exception, interrupting is generally considered rude and should be avoided. Even though verbal communication is most often used to interrupt another person, interruptions are still studied as a part of chronemics because it interferes with another person's talk time. Instead of interrupting, you can use nonverbal signals like leaning in, increasing your eye contact, or using a brief gesture like subtly raising one hand or the index finger to signal to another person that you'd like to soon take the floor.

Understand How Nonverbal Communication Relates to Listening

Part of being a good listener involves nonverbal-encoding competence, as nonverbal feedback in the form of head nods, eye contact, and posture can signal that a listener is paying attention and the speaker's message is received and understood. Active listening, for example, combines good cognitive listening practices with outwardly visible cues that signal to others that we are listening. We will learn more about active listening in chapter 5 but we all know from experience which nonverbal signals convey attentiveness and which convey a lack of attentiveness. Listeners are expected to make more eye contact with the speaker than the speaker makes with them, so it's important to "listen with your eyes" by maintaining eye contact, which signals attentiveness. Listeners should also avoid distracting movements in the form of self, other, and object adaptors. Being a higher self-monitor can help you catch nonverbal signals that might signal that you aren't listening, at which point you could consciously switch to more active listening signals.

Understand How Nonverbal Communication Relates to Impression Management

The nonverbal messages we encode also help us express our identities and play into impression management, which as we learned earlier is a key part of communicating to achieve identity goals. Being able to control nonverbal expressions and competently encode them allows us to better manage our persona and project a desired self to others—for example, a self that is perceived as competent and engaging. Being nonverbally expressive during initial interactions usually leads to more favorable impressions. So smiling, keeping an attentive posture, and offering a solid handshake help communicate confidence and enthusiasm that can be useful on a first date, during a job interview, when visiting family for the holidays, or when running into an acquaintance at the grocery store. Nonverbal communication can also impact the impressions you make as a student. Research has also found that students who are more nonverbally expressive are liked more by their teachers and are more likely to have their requests met by their teachers (Mottet et al., 2004).

Increase Competence in Specific Channels of Nonverbal Communication

While it is important to recognize that we send nonverbal signals through multiple channels simultaneously, we can also increase our nonverbal communication competence by becoming more aware of how it operates in specific channels. Although no one can truly offer you a rulebook on how to effectively send every type of nonverbal signal, there are several nonverbal guidebooks that are written from more anecdotal and less academic perspectives. While these books vary tremendously in terms of their credibility and quality, some are informative and interesting to read.

Kinesics

The following guidelines may help you more effectively encode nonverbal messages sent using your hands, arms, body, and face. Note that all suggestions are general and nonverbal success will vary based on cultural norms and contextual elements of the situation.

Gestures

- Illustrators make our verbal communication more engaging. Even when doing a phone interview or speaking on the radio, make an effort to gesture, even though people can't see the gestures, because it will make your words sound more engaging.
- Gestures send messages about your emotional state. Since many gestures are spontaneous or subconscious, it is important to raise your awareness of them and monitor them. Be aware that clenched hands may signal aggression or anger, nail-biting or fidgeting may signal nervousness, and finger tapping may signal boredom.

Eye Contact

- Eye contact is useful for initiating and regulating conversations. To make sure someone is available for interaction and to avoid being perceived as rude, it is usually a good idea to "catch their eye" before you start talking to them.

- Avoiding eye contact or shifting your eye contact from place to place can lead others to think you are being deceptive or inattentive. Minimize distractions by moving a clock, closing a door, or closing window blinds to help minimize distractions that may lure your eye contact away.
- Although avoiding eye contact can be perceived as a sign of disinterest, low confidence, or negative emotionality, eye contact avoidance can be used positively as a face-saving strategy. The notion of civil inattention refers to a social norm that leads us to avoid making eye contact with people in situations that deviate from expected social norms, such as witnessing someone fall or being in close proximity to a stranger expressing negative emotions (like crying). We also use civil inattention when we avoid making eye contact with others in crowded spaces (Goffman, 2010).

Facial Expressions

- You can use facial expressions to manage your expressions of emotions to intensify what you're feeling, to diminish what you're feeling, to cover up what you're feeling, to express a different emotion than you're feeling, or to simulate an emotion that you're not feeling (Metts & Planlap, 2002).
- Be aware of the power of emotional contagion, or the spread of emotion from one person to another. Since facial expressions are key for emotional communication, you may be able to strategically use your facial expressions to cheer someone up, lighten a mood, or create a more serious and somber tone.
- Smiles are especially powerful as an immediacy behavior and a rapport-building tool. Smiles can also help to disarm a potentially hostile person or deescalate conflict. When communicating a problem or complaint in a customer service situation, smiling at the clerk, manager, or other person before talking can help to set a more positive tone for the interaction.

Vocalics

The following guidelines may help you more effectively encode nonverbal signals using paralanguage.

- Verbal fillers are often used subconsciously and can negatively affect your credibility and reduce the clarity of your message when speaking in more formal situations. In fact, verbal fluency is one of the strongest predictors of persuasiveness (Hargie, 2011). Becoming a higher self-monitor can help you notice your use of verbal fillers and begin to eliminate them. Beginner speakers can often reduce their use of verbal fillers noticeably over just a short period of time.
- Vocal variety increases listener and speaker engagement, understanding, information recall, and motivation. So having a more expressive voice that varies appropriately in terms of rate, pitch, and volume can help you achieve communication goals related to maintaining attention, effectively conveying information, and getting others to act in a particular way.

Proxemics

The following may help you more effectively encode nonverbal signals related to interpersonal distances.

- When breaches of personal space occur, it is a social norm to make nonverbal adjustments such as lowering our level of immediacy, changing our body orientations, and using objects to separate ourselves from others. To reduce immediacy, we engage in civil inattention and reduce the amount of eye contact we make with others. We also shift the front of our body away from others since it has most of our sensory inputs and also allows access to body parts that are considered vulnerable, such as the stomach, face, and genitals (Andersen, 1999). When we can't shift our bodies, we often use coats, bags, books, or our hands to physically separate or block off the front of our bodies from others.

- Although pets and children are often granted more leeway to breach other people's space, since they are still learning social norms and rules, as a pet owner, parent, or temporary caretaker, be aware of this possibility and try to prevent such breaches or correct them when they occur.

Chronemics

The following guideline may help you more effectively encode nonverbal signals related to time.

- Our lateness or promptness can send messages about our professionalism, dependability, or other personality traits. Formal time usually applies to professional situations in which we are expected to be on time or even a few minutes early. You generally wouldn't want to be late for work, a job interview, a medical appointment, and so on. Informal time applies to casual and interpersonal situations in which there is much more variation in terms of expectations for promptness. For most social meetings with one other person or a small group, you can be five minutes late without having to offer much of an apology or explanation. For larger social gatherings you can usually be fifteen minutes late as long as your late arrival doesn't interfere with the host's plans or preparations.
- Quality time is an important part of interpersonal relationships, and sometimes time has to be budgeted so that it can be saved and spent with certain people or on certain occasions—like date nights for couples or family time for parents and children or other relatives.

Personal Presentation and Environment

The following guidelines may help you more effectively encode nonverbal signals related to personal presentation and environment.

- Recognize that personal presentation carries much weight in terms of initial impressions, so meeting the expectations and social norms for dress, grooming, and other artifactual communication is especially important for impression management.
- Recognize that some environments facilitate communication and some do not. A traditional front-facing business or educational setup is designed for one person to communicate with a larger audience. People in the audience cannot as easily interact with each other because they can't see each other face-to-face without turning. A horseshoe or circular arrangement allows everyone to make eye contact and facilitates interaction. Even close proximity doesn't necessarily facilitate interaction. For example, a comfortable sofa may bring four people together, but eye contact among all four is nearly impossible if they're all facing the same direction.
- Where you choose to sit can also impact perceived characteristics and leadership decisions. People who sit at the head or center of a table are often chosen to be leaders by others because of their nonverbal accessibility—a decision which may have more to do with where the person chose to sit than the person's perceived or actual leadership abilities. Research has found that juries often select their foreperson based on where he or she happens to sit (Andersen, 1999). Keep this in mind the next time you take your seat at a meeting.

Guidelines for Interpreting Nonverbal Messages

We learn to decode or interpret nonverbal messages through practice and by internalizing social norms. Following the suggestions to become a better encoder of nonverbal communication will lead to better decoding competence through increased awareness. Since nonverbal communication is more ambiguous than verbal communication, we have to learn to interpret these cues as clusters within contexts. Just by consciously taking in the variety of nonverbal signals around us, we can build our awareness and occasionally be entertained. Skilled decoders of nonverbal messages are said to have nonverbal sensitivity, which, very similar to skilled encoders, leads them to have larger social networks, be more popular, and exhibit less social anxiety (Riggio, 1992).

There Is No Nonverbal Dictionary

The first guideline for decoding nonverbal communication is to realize that there is no nonverbal dictionary. Some nonverbal scholars and many nonverbal skill trainers have tried to catalog nonverbal communication like we do verbal communication to create dictionary-like guides that people can use to interpret nonverbal signals. Although those guides may contain many valid "rules" of nonverbal communication, those rules are always relative to the individual, social, and cultural contexts in which an interaction takes place. In short, you can't read people's nonverbal communication like a book, and there are no A-to-Z guides that capture the complexity of nonverbal communication (DePaulo, 1992). Rather than using a list of specific *rules*, develop more general *tools* that will be useful in and adaptable to a variety of contexts.

Recognize That Certain Nonverbal Signals Are Related

The second guideline for decoding nonverbal signals is to recognize that certain nonverbal signals are related. Nonverbal rulebooks aren't effective because they typically view a nonverbal signal in isolation, similar to how dictionaries separately list denotative definitions of words. To get a more nuanced understanding of the meaning behind nonverbal cues, we can look at them as progressive or layered. For example, people engaging in negative critical evaluation of a speaker may cross their legs, cross one arm over their stomach, and put the other arm up so the index finger is resting close to the eye while the chin rests on the thumb (Pease & Pease, 2004). A person wouldn't likely perform all those signals simultaneously. Instead, he or she would likely start with one and then layer more cues on as the feelings intensified. If we notice that a person is starting to build related signals like the ones above onto one another, we might be able to intervene in the negative reaction that is building. Of course, as nonverbal cues are layered on, they may contradict other signals, in which case we can turn to context clues to aid our interpretation.

Although cultural patterns exist, people also exhibit idiosyncratic nonverbal behavior, meaning they don't always follow the norms of the group.

Jed Scattergood – School – CC BY-ND 2.0.

Read Nonverbal Cues in Context

We can gain insight into how to interpret nonverbal cues through personal contexts. People have idiosyncratic nonverbal behaviors, which create an individual context that varies with each person. Even though we generally fit into certain social and cultural patterns, some people deviate from those norms. For example, some cultures tend toward less touching and greater interpersonal distances during interactions. The United States falls into this general category, but there are people who were socialized into these norms who as individuals deviate from them and touch more and stand closer to others while conversing. As the idiosyncratic communicator inches toward his or her conversational partner, the partner may inch back to reestablish the interpersonal distance norm. Such deviations may lead people to misinterpret sexual or romantic interests or feel uncomfortable. While these actions could indicate such interest, they could also be idiosyncratic. As this example shows, these individual differences can increase the ambiguity of nonverbal communication, but when observed over a period of time, they can actually help us generate meaning. Try to compare observed nonverbal cues to a person's typical or baseline nonverbal behavior to help avoid misinterpretation. In some instances, it is impossible to know what sorts of individual nonverbal behaviors or idiosyncrasies people have because there isn't a relational history. In such cases, we have to turn to our knowledge about specific types of nonverbal communication or draw from more general contextual knowledge.

Interpreting Cues within Specific Channels

When nonverbal cues are ambiguous or contextual clues aren't useful in interpreting nonverbal clusters, we may have to look at nonverbal behaviors within specific channels. Keep in mind that the following tips aren't hard and fast rules and are usually more meaningful when adapted according to a specific person or context. In addition, many of the suggestions in the section on encoding competence can be adapted usefully to decoding.

Kinesics

Gestures (Pease & Pease, 2004)

- While it doesn't always mean a person is being honest, displaying palms is largely unconsciously encoded and

decoded as a sign of openness and truthfulness. Conversely, crossing your arms in front of your chest is decoded almost everywhere as a negative gesture that conveys defensiveness.
- We typically decode people putting their hands in their pockets as a gesture that indicates shyness or discomfort. Men often subconsciously put their hands in their pockets when they don't want to participate in a conversation. But displaying the thumb or thumbs while the rest of the hand is in the pocket is a signal of a dominant or authoritative attitude.
- Nervous communicators may have distracting mannerisms in the form of adaptors that you will likely need to tune out in order to focus more on other verbal and nonverbal cues.

Head Movements and Posture

- The head leaning over and being supported by a hand can typically be decoded as a sign of boredom, the thumb supporting the chin and the index finger touching the head close to the temple or eye as a sign of negative evaluative thoughts, and the chin stroke as a sign that a person is going through a decision-making process (Pease & Pease, 2004).
- In terms of seated posture, leaning back is usually decoded as a sign of informality and indifference, straddling a chair as a sign of dominance (but also some insecurity because the person is protecting the vulnerable front part of his or her body), and leaning forward as a signal of interest and attentiveness.

Eye Contact

- When someone is avoiding eye contact, don't immediately assume they are not listening or are hiding something, especially if you are conveying complex or surprising information. Since looking away also signals cognitive activity,

they may be processing information, and you may need to pause and ask if they need a second to think or if they need you to repeat or explain anything more.
- A “sideways glance,” which entails keeping the head and face pointed straight ahead while focusing the eyes to the left or right, has multiple contradictory meanings ranging from interest to uncertainty, to hostility. When the sideways glance is paired with a slightly raised eyebrow or smile, it is the sign of interest. When combined with a furrowed brow it generally conveys uncertainty. But add a frown to that mix and it can signal hostility (Pease & Pease, 2004).

Facial Expressions

- Be aware of discrepancies between facial expressions and other nonverbal gestures and verbal communication. Since facial expressions are often subconscious, they may be an indicator of incongruency within a speaker’s message, and you may need to follow up with questions or consider contextual clues to increase your understanding.

Haptics

- Consider the status and power dynamics involved in touch. In general, people who have or feel they have more social power in a situation typically engage in more touching behaviors with those with less social power. So you may decode a touch from a supervisor differently from the touch of an acquaintance.

Vocalics

- People often decode personality traits from a person’s vocal quality. In general, a person's vocal signature is a result of the physiology of his or her neck, head, and mouth. Therefore a nasal voice or a deep voice may not have any relevant meaning within an interaction. Try not to focus on something you find unpleasant or pleasant about someone's voice; focus on the content rather than the vocal quality.

Proxemics

- The size of a person's "territory" often speaks to that person's status. At universities, deans may have suites, department chairs may have large offices with multiple sitting areas, lower-ranked professors may have "cozier" offices stuffed with books and file cabinets, and adjunct instructors may have a shared office or desk or no office space at all.
- Since infringements on others' territory can arouse angry reactions and even lead to violence (think of the countless stories of neighbors fighting over a fence or tree), be sensitive to territorial markers. In secondary and public territories, look for informal markers such as drinks, books, or jackets and be respectful of them when possible.

Personal Presentation and Environment

- Be aware of the physical attractiveness bias, which leads people to sometimes mistakenly equate attractiveness with goodness (Hargie, 2011). A person's attractive or unattractive physical presentation can lead to irrelevant decoding that is distracting from other more meaningful nonverbal cues.

Detecting Deception

Although people rely on nonverbal communication more than verbal to determine whether or not a person is being deceptive, there is no set profile of deceptive behaviors that you can use to create your own nonverbally based lie detector. Research finds that people generally perceive themselves as good detectors of deception, but when tested people only accurately detect deception at levels a little higher than what we would by random chance. Given that deception is so widespread and common, it is estimated that we actually only detect about half the lies that we are told, meaning we all operate on false information without even being aware of it. Although this may be disappointing to those of you reading who like to think of yourselves as human lie detectors, there are some forces working against our deception detecting abilities. One such force is the *truth bias*, which leads us to believe that a person is telling the truth, especially if we know and like that person. Conversely, people who have interpersonal trust issues and people in occupations like law enforcement may also have a lie bias, meaning they assume people are lying to them more often than not (Andersen, 1999).

It is believed that deceptive nonverbal behaviors result from nonverbal leakage, which refers to nonverbal behaviors that occur as we try to control the cognitive and physical changes that happen during states of cognitive and physical arousal (Hargie, 2011). Anxiety is a form of arousal that leads to bodily reactions like those we experience when we perceive danger or become excited for some other reason. Some of these reactions are visible, such as increased movements, and some are audible, such as changes in voice pitch, volume, or rate. Other reactions, such as changes in the electrical conductivity of the skin, increased breathing, and increased heart rate, are not always detectable. Polygraph machines, or lie detectors, work on the principle that the presence of signs of arousal is a reliable indicator of deception in situations where other factors that would also evoke such signals are absent.

There is no one "tell" that gives away when someone is lying.

Kevin Trotman – You Lie! – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

There are certain nonverbal cues that have been associated with deception, but the problem is that these cues are also associated with other behaviors, which could lead you to assume someone is being deceptive when they are actually nervous, guilty, or excited. In general, people who are more expressive are better deceivers and people who are typically anxious are not good liars. Also, people who are better self-monitors are better deceivers, because they are aware of verbal and nonverbal signals that may "give them away" and may be better able to control or account for them. Research also shows that people get better at lying as they get older because they learn more about the intricacies of communication signals and they also get more time to practice (Andersen, 1999). Studies have found that actors, politicians, lawyers, and salespeople are also better liars because they are generally higher self-monitors and have learned how to suppress internal feelings and monitor their external behaviors.

"Getting Competent"

Deception and Communication Competence

The research on deception and nonverbal communication indicates that heightened arousal and increased cognitive demands contribute to the presence of nonverbal behaviors that can be associated with deception. Remember, however, that these nonverbal behaviors are not solely related to deception and also manifest as a result of other emotional or cognitive states. Additionally, when people are falsely accused of deception, the signs that they exhibit as a result of the stress of being falsely accused are very similar to the signals exhibited by people who are actually engaging in deception.

There are common misconceptions about what behaviors are associated with deception. Behaviors mistakenly linked to deception include longer response times, slower speech rates, decreased eye contact, increased body movements, excessive swallowing, and less smiling. None of these have consistently been associated with deception (Andersen, 1999). As we've learned, people also tend to give more weight to nonverbal than verbal cues when evaluating the truthfulness of a person or her or his message. This predisposition can lead us to focus on nonverbal cues while overlooking verbal signals of deception. A large study found that people were better able to detect deception by sound alone than they were when exposed to both auditory and visual cues (Andersen, 1999). Aside from nonverbal cues, also listen for inconsistencies in or contradictions between statements, which can also be used to tell when others are being deceptive. The following are some nonverbal signals that have been associated with deception in research studies, but be cautious about viewing these as absolutes since individual and contextual differences should also be considered.

Gestures. One of the most powerful associations between nonverbal behaviors and deception is the presence of adaptors. Self-touches like wringing hands and object-adaptors like playing with a pencil or messing with clothing have been shown to correlate to deception. Some highly experienced deceivers, however, can control the presence of adaptors (Andersen, 1999).

Eye contact. Deceivers tend to use more eye contact when lying to friends, perhaps to try to increase feelings of immediacy or warmth, and less eye contact when lying to strangers. A review of many studies of deception indicates that increased eye blinking is associated with deception, probably because of heightened arousal and cognitive activity (Andersen, 1999).

Facial expressions. People can intentionally use facial expressions to try to deceive, and there are five primary ways that this may occur. People may show feelings that they do not actually have, show a higher intensity of feelings than they actually have, try to show no feelings, try to show less feeling than they actually have, or mask one feeling with another.

Vocalics. One of the most common nonverbal signs of deception is speech errors. As you'll recall, verbal fillers and other speech disfluencies are studied as part of vocalics; examples include false starts, stutters, and fillers. Studies also show that an increase in verbal pitch is associated with deception and is likely caused by heightened arousal and tension.

Chronemics. Speech turns are often thought to correspond to deception, but there is no consensus among researchers as to the exact relationship. Most studies reveal that deceivers talk less, especially in response to direct questions (Andersen, 1999).

1. Studies show that people engage in deception much more than they care to admit. Do you consider yourself a good deceiver? Why or why not? Which, if any, of the nonverbal cues discussed do you think help you deceive others or give you away?
2. For each of the following scenarios, note (1) what behaviors may indicate deception, (2) alternative explanations for the behaviors (aside from deception), and (3) questions you could ask to get more information before making a judgment.

Scenario 1. A politician is questioned by a reporter about allegations that she used taxpayer money to fund personal vacations. She looks straight at the reporter, crosses one leg over the other, and says, "I've worked for the people of this community for ten years and no one has ever questioned my ethics until now." As she speaks, she points her index finger at the politician and uses a stern and clear tone of voice.

Scenario 2. You ask your roommate if you can borrow his car to go pick up a friend from the train station about ten miles away. He says, "Um, well…I had already made plans to go to dinner with Cal and he drove last time so it's kind of my turn to drive this time. I mean, is there someone else you could ask or someone else who could get her? You know I don't mind sharing things with you, and I would totally let you, you know, if I didn't have this thing to do. Sorry." As he says, "Sorry," he raises both of his hands, with his palms facing toward you, and shrugs.

Scenario 3. A professor asks a student to explain why he didn't cite sources for several passages in his paper that came from various websites. The student scratches his head and says, "What do you mean? Those were my ideas. I did look at several websites, but I didn't directly quote anything so I didn't think I needed to put the citations in parentheses." As he says this, he rubs the back of his neck and then scratches his face and only makes minimal eye contact with the professor.

Key Takeaways

- To improve your competence encoding nonverbal messages, increase your awareness of the messages you are sending and receiving and the contexts in which your communication is taking place. Since nonverbal communication is multichannel, it is important to be aware that nonverbal cues can complement, enhance, or contradict each other. Also realize that the norms and expectations for sending nonverbal messages, especially touch and personal space, vary widely between relational and professional contexts.

- To improve your competence decoding nonverbal messages, look for multiple nonverbal cues, avoid putting too much weight on any one cue, and evaluate nonverbal messages in relation to the context and your previous experiences with the other person. Although we put more weight on nonverbal communication than verbal when trying to detect deception, there is no set guide that can allow us to tell whether or not another person is being deceptive.

Exercises

1. Getting integrated: As was indicated earlier, research shows that instruction in nonverbal communication can lead people to make gains in their nonverbal communication competence. List some nonverbal skills that you think are important in each of the following contexts: academic, professional, personal, and civic.
2. Using concepts from this section, analyze your own nonverbal encoding competence. What are your

strengths and weaknesses? Do the same for your nonverbal decoding competence

3. To understand how chronemics relates to nonverbal communication norms, answer the following questions: In what situations is it important to be early? In what situations can you arrive late? How long would you wait on someone you were meeting for a group project for a class? A date? A job interview?

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4.4 Nonverbal Communication and Culture and Gender

Learning Objectives

1. Discuss the role of nonverbal communication in relational contexts.
2. Discuss the role of nonverbal communication in professional contexts.
3. Provide examples of cultural differences in nonverbal communication.
4. Provide examples of gender differences in nonverbal communication.

Nonverbal communication receives less attention than verbal communication as a part of our everyday lives. Learning about cultural differences in nonverbal communication is important for people traveling abroad but also due to our increasingly multinational business world and the expanding diversity and increased frequency of intercultural communication within our own borders.

Nonverbal Communication and Culture

As with other aspects of communication, norms for nonverbal communication vary from country to country and also among cultures within a particular country. We've already learned that some nonverbal communication behaviors appear to be somewhat innate because they are universally recognized. Two such universal signals are the "eyebrow flash" of recognition when we see someone we know and the open hand and the palm up gesture that signals a person would like something or needs help (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). Smiling is also a universal nonverbal behavior, but the triggers that lead a person to smile vary from culture to culture. The expansion of media, particularly from the United States and other Western countries around the world, is leading to more nonverbal similarities among cultures, but the biggest cultural differences in nonverbal communication occur within the categories of eye contact, touch, and personal space (Pease & Pease, 2004). Next, we will overview some interesting and instructive differences within several channels of nonverbal communication that we have discussed so far. As you read, remember that these are not absolute, in that nonverbal communication like other forms of communication is influenced by context and varies among individuals within a particular cultural group as well.

Kinesics

Cultural variations in the way we gesture, use head movements, and use eye contact fall under the nonverbal category of kinesics.

Gestures

Remember that emblems are gestures that correspond to a word and an agreed-on meaning. When we use our fingers to count, we are using emblematic gestures, but even our way of counting varies among cultures (Pease & Pease, 2004). I could fairly accurately separate British people and US Americans from French, Greek, and German people based on a simple and common gesture. Let's try this exercise: First, display with your hand the number five. Second, keeping the five displayed, change it to a two. If you are from the United States or Britain you are probably holding up your index finder and your middle finger. If you are from another European country you are probably holding up your thumb and index finger. While Americans and Brits start counting on their index finger and end with five on their thumb, other Europeans start counting on their thumb and end with five on their pinky finger.

This common gesture for "five" or as a signal to get someone's attention is called a *moutza* in Greece and is an insult gesture that means you want to rub excrement in someone's face. See example in Note 4.38 "Video Clip 4.1".

How you use your hands can also get you into trouble if you're unaware of cultural differences (Pease & Pease, 2004). For example, the "thumbs up" gesture, as we just learned, can mean "one" in mainland Europe, but it also means "up yours" in Greece (when thrust forward) and is recognized as a signal for hitchhiking or "good," "good job / way to go," or "OK" in many other cultures. Two hands up with the palms out can signal "ten" in many Western countries and is recognized as a signal for "I'm telling the truth" or "I surrender" in many cultures. The same gesture, however, means "up yours twice" in Greece. So using that familiar gesture to say you surrender might actually end up escalating rather than ending a conflict if used in Greece.

You can take a cross-cultural awareness quiz to learn some more interesting cultural variations in gestures at the following link: http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/quiz/gestures.php.

Video Clip 4.1

Soccer Player Directs Insult Gesture to Referee

<a data-iframe-code="
//youtube.com/watch?v=xCzolzhy_vk"
" href="http://youtube.com/watch?v=xCzolzhy_vk" class="replaced-iframe">(click to see video)

Head Movements

Bowing is a nonverbal greeting ritual that is more common in Asian cultures than Western cultures, but the head nod, which is a common form of acknowledgement in many cultures, is actually an abbreviated bow. Japan is considered a noncontact culture, which refers to cultural groups in which people stand farther apart while talking, make less eye contact, and touch less during regular interactions. Because of this, bowing is the preferred nonverbal greeting over handshaking. Bows vary based on status, with higher status people bowing the least. For example, in order to indicate the status of another person, a Japanese businessperson may bow deeply. An interesting ritual associated with the bow is the exchange of business cards when greeting someone in Japan. This exchange allows each person to view the other's occupation and title, which provides useful information about the other's status and determines who should bow more. Since bowing gives each person a good view of the other person's shoes, it is very important to have clean shoes that are in good condition, since they play an important part of initial impression formation.

Eye Contact

In some cultures, avoiding eye contact is considered a sign of respect. Such eye contact aversion, however, could be seen as a sign that the other person is being deceptive, is bored, or is being rude. Some Native American nations teach that people should avoid eye contact with elders, teachers, and other people with status. This can create issues in classrooms when teachers are unaware of this norm and may consider a Native American student's lack of eye contact as a sign of insubordination or lack of engagement, which could lead to false impressions that the student is a troublemaker or less intelligent.

Haptics

As we've learned, touch behaviors are important during initial interactions, and cultural differences in these nonverbal practices can lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding. Shaking hands as a typical touch greeting, for example, varies among cultures (Pease & Pease, 2004). It is customary for British, Australian, German, and US American colleagues to shake hands when seeing each other for the first time and then to shake again when departing company. In the United States, the colleagues do not normally shake hands again if they see each other again later in the day, but European colleagues may shake hands with each other several times a day. Once a certain level of familiarity and closeness is reached, US American colleagues will likely not even shake hands daily unless engaging in some more formal interaction, but many European colleagues will continue to shake each time they see each other. Some French businesspeople have been known to spend up to thirty minutes a day shaking hands. The squeezes and up-and-down shakes used during handshakes are often called "pumps," and the number of pumps used in a handshake also varies among cultures. Although the Germans and French shake hands more often throughout the day, they typically only give one or two pumps and then hold the shake for a couple seconds before letting go. Brits tend to give three to five pumps, and US Americans tend to give five to seven pumps. This can be humorous to watch at a multinational business event, but it also affects the initial impressions people make of each other. A US American may think that a German is being unfriendly or distant because of his or her single hand pump, while a German may think that a US American is overdoing it with seven.

Contact cultures are cultural groups in which people stand closer together, engage in more eye contact, touch more frequently, and speak more loudly. Italians are especially known for their vibrant nonverbal communication in terms of gestures, volume, eye contact, and touching, which not surprisingly places them in the contact culture category. Italians use hand motions and touching to regulate the flow of conversations, and when non-Italians don't know how to mirror an Italian's nonverbals they may not get to contribute much to the conversation, which likely feeds into the stereotype of Italians as domineering in conversations or overexpressive. For example, Italians speak with their hands raised as a way to signal that they are holding the floor for their conversational turn. If their conversational partner starts to raise his or her hands, the Italian might gently touch the other person and keep on talking. Conversational partners often interpret this as a sign of affection or of the Italian's passion for what he or she is saying. In fact, it is a touch intended to keep the partner from raising his or her hands, which would signal that the Italian's conversational turn is over and the other person now has the floor. It has been suggested that in order to get a conversational turn, you must physically grab their hands in midair and pull them down. While this would seem very invasive and rude to northern Europeans and US Americans, it is a nonverbal norm in Italian culture and may be the only way to get to contribute to a conversation (Pease & Pease, 2004).

Vocalics

The volume at which we speak is influenced by specific contexts and is more generally influenced by our culture. In European countries like France, England, Sweden, and Germany, it is not uncommon to find restaurants that have small tables very close together. In many cases, two people dining together may be sitting at a table that is actually touching the table of another pair of diners. Most US Americans would consider this a violation of personal space, and Europeans often perceive US Americans to be rude in such contexts because they do not control the volume of their conversations more. Since personal space is usually more plentiful in the United States, Americans are used to speaking at a level that is considered loud to many cultures that are used to less personal space. I have personally experienced both sides of this while traveling abroad. One time, my friends and I were asked to leave a restaurant in Sweden because another table complained that we were being loud. Another time, at a restaurant in Argentina, I was disturbed, as were the others dining around me, by a "loud" table of Americans seated on the other side of the dining area. In this case, even though we were also Americans, we were bothered by the lack of cultural awareness being exhibited by the other Americans at the restaurant. These examples show how proxemics and vocalics can combine to make for troubling, but hopefully informative, nonverbal intercultural encounters.

Proxemics

Cultural norms for personal space vary much more than some other nonverbal communication channels such as facial expressions, which have more universal similarity and recognizability. We've already learned that contact and noncontact cultures differ in their preferences for touch and interpersonal distance. Countries in South America and southern Europe exhibit characteristics of contact cultures, while countries in northern Europe and Southeast Asia exhibit noncontact cultural characteristics. Because of the different comfort levels with personal space, a Guatemalan and a Canadian might come away with differing impressions of each other because of proxemic differences. The Guatemalan may feel the Canadian is standoffish, and the Canadian may feel the Guatemalan is pushy or aggressive.

Chronemics

The United States and many northern and western European countries have a monochronic orientation to time, meaning time is seen as a commodity that can be budgeted, saved, spent, and wasted. Events are to be scheduled in advance and have set beginning and ending times. Countries like Spain and Mexico have a polychronic orientation to time. Appointments may be scheduled at overlapping times, making an "orderly" schedule impossible. People may also miss appointments or deadlines without offering an apology, which would be considered very rude by a person with a monochronic orientation to time. People from cultures with a monochronic orientation to time are frustrated when people from polychromic cultures cancel appointments or close businesses for family obligations. Conversely, people from polychromic cultures feel that US Americans, for example, follow their schedules at the expense of personal relationships (Martin & Nakayama, 2010).

Nonverbal Gender Communication

Overall, men and women tend to behave in relatively consistent ways. However, as a product of social conditioning, and in order to appease long-held social customs that have developed around gender binaries, there are some documented differences in the ways that most men and women interact. This is particularly true when they are interacting with other members of their own gender.

Due to the normalized factors of gender expectations among women and men, females are socialized to be more accommodating and emotionally intuitive regarding interpersonal skills. Also, because of societal norms and social construction, men are less likely to get physically close to other men, whereas women are more accepting of being touched by other women. While men may not touch each other or be in close proximity when communicating as much as women, it's often acceptable to chest bump a teammate or give him a slap on the buttocks in an athletic competition. The context matters. Also important are the cultural norms that vary from country to country or ethnicity to ethnicity. European cultures tend to communicate with less distance than in the United States. Proximity also varies between Northern Europe to Southern Europe or from North America to South America. The frequency of handshakes, hugs, and kisses varies from region to region, and culture to culture.

The differences between men and women sharing a household are not limited to parenting. Studies also show that the distribution of household work remains uneven between men and women, with women straddled with the majority of household chores, despite spending equal amounts of time outside the home earning income. This inequity has far-reaching consequences. Scholars have found that in households where both partners view their chores as being evenly shared, both partners are also more likely to report high satisfaction with their sex life (Gager & Yabiku, 2010).

One reason for the disparities we see in how households divide time by gender may be that different genders have been acculturated to approach their bonding activities differently (Endendijk, et al., 2017). Whereas men are taught from youth how to bond through shared structured activities like sports, or imaginary play where the roles are assigned, women are typically raised to value communication as the primary means of bonding. Consider for example, the difference between a girl being taught to play with her dolls through imaginary chat or tea times, and little boys being steered toward video games, or a shootout between designated cowboys and Indians (Wood, 2012; Kimmel, 2013).

Speech Communities

One way that theorists have approached the differences in communication between genders is through the framework of speech communities. Julia Wood (2009) discusses the differences in how men and women use language by theorizing that they adopt different speech communities. The goal is to understand the role of culture in creating a set of norms and practices that are influenced by gender performance. Drawing from Langer's postulation of "discourse communities" (Langer, 1953; Ghosh, 1979) and Labov's discussion of "speech communities" (1974), Wood formulates the idea of gendered speech communities. The basis of any speech community is a set of shared beliefs and practices that are influenced by history and the experiences in an environment and how these factors over time develop unique characteristics of communication practices within the group. Wood explains that "socialization is a gendered process in which boys and girls are encouraged to develop masculine and feminine identities" (2009, p. 19). The goal of understanding gendered speech communities is to explore how socialization creates these specific patterns of communication among females and males.

To be a part of a gendered speech community does not imply that you identify as that gender, or that you perform that gender role on a routine basis. Instead, the notion of a gendered speech community suggests that certain broad patterns of communication and specific practices of communication can be tied to either masculine or feminine gender performances, based on long-standing traditions, and drawn from the historical research on gender communication, which was most often conducted under the presumption of a naturally occurring gender binary (Wood, 2012).

Today, we view speech communities as a useful way to examine still prevalent communication practices that may be employed for different reasons, regardless of sex, or gender identity, but that still convey gendered meaning in our society, and/or accord with social expectations based on gender. In other words, these are gendered practices that may be theoretically passé, even though they remain practically consistent.

Feminine Speech Communities

People who communicate in the feminine speech community tend to value verbal communication primarily as a means of building and maintaining relationships through the sharing of personal experiences, ideas, or concerns. For this reason, the rituals of talk in the feminine speech community differ from those in the masculine speech community and are called *relational talk*. Women have historically been identified in large part by their communication practices, beginning with the supposition that women enjoy talking more than men, and that they crave talk more than men do. Research shows that in fact men and women communicate verbally an equal amount, though they may tend to communicate in different ways overall, and for different purposes (Wood, 2012).

To begin, members of the feminine speech community view verbal communication as an opportunity to express their own identities, and to build relationships through acts of mutual disclosure that demonstrate trust. Female socialization presents different communication patterns than males beginning with childhood games. Wood (2009) explains how girls' games involve smaller groups with less rigid rules and goals. Girls' games are more fluid and made up as the game unfolds, in direct contrast to the individualistic nature of boys' games. Due to the lack of "external rules to settle disputes," girls learn to cooperate and communicate with each other in a collaborative fashion. Girls' games are more focused on process than content with sensitivity to feelings. Criticism, exclusion of others, and outdoing the competition are not acceptable behavior. The focus is less on achieving a goal. The goal is communication itself as girls strive to create an inclusive environment.

In the feminine speech community, it is common to relate stories of past experiences and to do so by providing specific details, in order to create opportunities for others to relate, or find common threads that can lead to a meaningful response. In this community, relationships tend to revolve around sharing of information, rather than sharing activities, and for this reason, studies have found that people in the feminine speech community tend to maintain relationships with others, even when they are separated by vast distances geographically (Wood, 2012).

Into adulthood women use communication to "maintain relationships with others…learn themselves and share with others" (Wood, 2009, p. 21). Wood (2009) breaks feminine communication down into seven features or qualities:

- Maintaining relationships
- Equality
- Showing support
- Conversational "maintenance" work
- Responsiveness
- Personal concrete style
- Tentativeness

Because the feminine speech community values the building and maintenance of relationships through verbal communication, they are also more likely than members of the masculine speech community to use their talk as a way of offering support to others. In part, this is why members of the feminine speech community are more apt to inquire about issues relating to family, health, and well-being in their conversations, because these inquiries can help them determine if support is needed by their conversation partner. Sometimes the feminine speech community provides support, not just by offering comforting or affirming statements, but also by listening to the other person and allowing them a chance to process their feelings and thoughts in an environment absent of judgment or critique (Wood, 2012).

Masculine Speech Communities

As Wood (2012) theorizes, the masculine speech community approaches verbal communication more pragmatically. Members of the masculine speech community use talk instrumentally in order to achieve goals. In this community, members share information in order to accomplish tasks- even if the task is something like, starting a relationship. For example, someone from the masculine speech community might view the conversation they make on a first date as a necessary prelude to advancing the relationship to the second date, rather than as an opportunity to share for sharing's sake. For them, the conversation is framed as a win/lose scenario, and their mind is likely working hard to ensure that when they speak they say the 'right thing' in order to satisfy their date's expectations, and succeed as a dinner partner.

Gendered patterns of communication begin in childhood with the games children play. For boys, the games often involve large groups, are competitive, and rely on strict guidelines and rules (Wood, 2012). Boys' games are about asserting dominance, standing out, and being better than the other players. These factors have a direct impact on communication development as boys are taught to assert themselves, compete and attract attention. Since boys are taught to be competitive and dominant, weakness and vulnerability are unacceptable. Within a team context, individuality is still important because the individual skill set is highly valued. The emphasis on being strong, competitive, and invulnerable starts a pattern of communication practices that are more impersonal and focused on achieving an explicit goal.

Because the masculine speech community engages with verbal communication in a less spontaneous and more *instrumental talk* fashion, it is no surprise that its members also use verbal communication in a more competitive manner—engaging in verbal and paralanguage tactics designed to one-up their conversation partners, especially during a disagreement. Examples of such competitive tactics include interrupting, scoffing, raising their volume, and using sarcastic tones unnecessarily (Wood, 2012;

Greenwood, 2017). Often, these behaviors may not be consciously motivated by competition; rather it is a product of how the community views the purpose and value of talk—as a means by which goals are achieved. In that context, these kinds of aggressive behaviors demonstrate implied values like dominance, bravery, and intellectual superiority (Wood, 2012).

Masculine speech communities emphasize goals, assertions, preserving independence and enhancing status (Wood, 2009). By respecting others' independence, males establish boundaries of respect, masculine talk focuses on the elaboration of a skillset or displays of being able to get things done. Men are less likely to express vulnerability or disclose personal information that will make them appear weak or diminish their status. If someone expresses concern, the masculine style is to give problem solving advice.

The following are characteristics of masculine speech communities:

- Exhibit knowledge
- Instrumentality
- Conversational dominance
- Absolute assertion
- Abstractness
- Non-responsiveness

Differences in the socialized communication practices of men and women often create situations where someone misinterprets the other's meaning. If the codes, norms, and practices are not understood across genders, one may respond in a manner that creates a disconnect or conflict. Grasping the various ways feminine and masculine speech communities communicate is important in developing interpersonal relationships.

On the whole, the masculine speech community tends to communicate more concisely, focusing on information they view as pertinent, rather than allowing themselves to disclose information as a way of relating to others. For this reason, there is wide room for miscommunication when they interact with people from the feminine speech community (Wood, 2012). One product of the masculine speech community's view of talk as competition is mansplaining: a sexist practice in which men attempt to assert dominance by explaining things to women that the women either already know, or didn't want to know (Solnit, 2017). Not all men are prone to doing this, but men who are also members of the masculine speech community are likely to think that by relating their knowledge of something, even if no one has asked them to do so, proves their intelligence and earns them admiration.

In keeping with their instrumental view of talk, masculine speech community members may also offend people from the feminine speech community if they are seen to be ignoring cues for mutual disclosure or supportive statements. Research finds that in professional situations, people from the masculine speech community tend to misinterpret queries from their co-workers that are meant to start a conversation by assuming the co-worker needs them to solve a problem (Yoshimura & Hayden, 2007). This is one of the most common sources of conflict between the two speech communities. Where members of the feminine speech community may disclose a problem or obstacle they face in order to solicit support, members of the masculine speech community are likely to view this disclosure as an opportunity to fix the problem by providing unwanted advice (Wood, 2012).

Key Takeaways

- Although some of our nonverbal signals appear to be more innate and culturally universal, many others vary considerably among cultures, especially in terms of the use of space (proxemics), eye contact (oculesics), and touch (haptics).

- Rather than learning a list of rules for cultural variations in nonverbal cues, it is better to develop more general knowledge about how nonverbal norms vary based on cultural values and to view this knowledge as tools that can be adapted for use in many different cultural contexts.
- In terms of gender, most of the nonverbal differences are exaggerations of biological differences onto which we have imposed certain meanings and values. M

Exercises

1. Identify some nonverbal behaviors that would signal a positive interaction on a first date and on a job interview. Then identify some nonverbal behaviors that would signal a negative interaction in each of those contexts.
2. Discuss an experience where you have had some kind of miscommunication or misunderstanding because of cultural or gender differences in encoding and decoding nonverbal messages. What did you learn in this chapter that could help you in similar future interactions?

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PART V

CHAPTER 5: COMMUNICATION IN RELATIONSHIPS

More than 2,300 years ago, Aristotle wrote about the importance of friendships to society, and other Greek philosophers wrote about emotions and their effects on relationships. Although research on relationships has increased dramatically over the past few decades, the fact that these revered ancient philosophers included them in their writings illustrates the important place interpersonal relationships have in human life.Daniel Perlman and Steve Duck, "The Seven Seas of the Study of Personal Relationships: From 'The Thousand Islands' to Interconnected Waterways," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships*, eds. Anita L. Vangelisti and Daniel Perlman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 13. But how do we come to form relationships with friends, family, romantic partners, and coworkers? Why are some of these relationships more exciting, stressful, enduring, or short-lived than others? Are we guided by fate, astrology, luck, personality, or other forces to the people we like and love? We'll begin to answer those questions in this chapter.

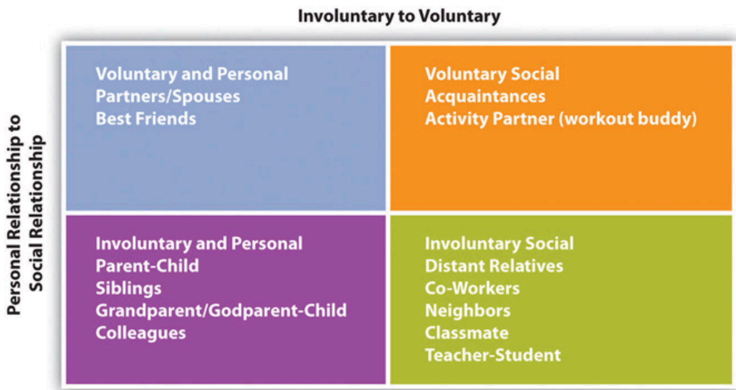
5.1 Foundations of Relationships

Learning Objectives

1. Distinguish between personal and social relationships.
2. Describe stages of relational interaction.
3. Discuss reasons for developing, maintaining, and terminating relationships

We can begin to classify key relationships we have by distinguishing between our personal and our social relationships (VanLear, Koerner, & Allen, 2006). *Personal relationships* meet emotional, relational, and instrumental needs, as they are intimate, close, and interdependent relationships such as those we have with best friends, partners, or immediate family. *Social relationships* are relationships that occasionally meet our needs and lack the closeness and interdependence of personal relationships. Examples of social relationships include coworkers, distant relatives, and acquaintances. Another distinction useful for categorizing relationships is whether or not they are *voluntary*. For example, some personal relationships are voluntary, like those with romantic partners, and some are *involuntary*, like those with close siblings. Likewise, some social relationships are voluntary, like those with acquaintances, and some are involuntary, like those with neighbors or distant relatives. You can see how various relationships fall into each of these dimensions in Figure 7.1 "Types of Relationships". Now that we have a better understanding of how we define relationships, we'll examine the stages that most of our relationships go through as they move from formation to termination.

Figure 7.1 Types of Relationships



Source: Adapted from C. Arthur VanLear, Ascan Koerner, and Donna M. Allen, "Relationship Typologies," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships*, eds. Anita L. Vangelisti and Daniel Perlman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 95.

Stages of Relational Development

Communication is at the heart of forming our interpersonal relationships. We reach the achievement of relating through the everyday conversations and otherwise trivial interactions that form the fabric of our relationships. It is through our communication that we adapt to the dynamic nature of our relational worlds, given that relational partners do not enter each encounter or relationship with compatible expectations. Communication allows us to test and be tested by our potential and current relational partners. It is also through communication that we respond when someone violates or fails to meet those expectations (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009).

There are ten established stages of interaction that can help us understand how relationships come together and come apart (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009). We will discuss each stage in more detail, but in Table 7.1 "Relationship Stages" you will find a list of the communication stages. We should keep the following things in mind about this model of relationship development: relational partners do not always go through the stages sequentially, some relationships do not experience all the stages, we do not always consciously move between stages, and coming together and coming apart are not inherently good or bad. As we have already discussed, relationships are always changing—they are *dynamic*. Although this model has been applied most often to romantic relationships, most other relationships follow a similar pattern that may be adapted to a particular context.

Table 7.1 Relationship Stages

Process	Stage	Representative Communication
Coming Together	Initiating	"My name's Rich. It's nice to meet you."
	Experimenting	"I like to cook and refinish furniture in my spare time. What about you?"
	Intensifying	"I feel like we've gotten a lot closer over the past couple months."
	Integrating	(To friend) "We just opened a joint bank account."
	Bonding	"I can't wait to tell my parents that we decided to get married!"
Coming Apart	Differentiating	"I'd really like to be able to hang out with my friends sometimes."
	Circumscribing	"Don't worry about problems I'm having at work. I can deal with it."
	Stagnating	(To self) "I don't know why I even asked him to go out to dinner. He never wants to go out and have a good time."
	Avoiding	"I have a lot going on right now, so I probably won't be home as much."
	Terminating	"It's important for us both to have some time apart. I know you'll be fine."

Source: Adapted from Mark L. Knapp and Anita L. Vangelisti, *Interpersonal Communication and Human Relationships* (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2009), 34.

Initiating

In the initiating stage, people size each other up and try to present themselves favorably. Whether you run into someone in the hallway at school or in the produce section at the grocery store, you scan the person and consider any previous knowledge you have of them, expectations for the situation, and so on. Initiating is influenced by several factors.

If you encounter a stranger, you may say, "Hi, my name's Rich."

If you encounter a person you already know, you've already gone through this before, so you may just say, "What's up?" Time constraints also affect initiation. A quick passing calls for a quick hello, while a scheduled meeting may entail a more formal start. If you already know the person, the length of time that's passed since your last encounter will affect your initiation. For example, if you see a friend from high school while home for winter break, you may set aside a long block of time to catch up; however, if you see someone at work that you just spoke to ten minutes earlier, you may skip initiating communication. The setting also affects how we initiate conversations, as we communicate differently at a crowded bar than we do on an airplane. Even with all this variation, people typically follow typical social scripts for interaction at this stage.

Experimenting

The scholars who developed these relational stages have likened the experimenting stage, where people exchange information and often move from strangers to acquaintances, to the "sniffing ritual" of animals (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009). A basic exchange of information is typical as the experimenting stage begins. For example, on the first day of class, you may chat with the person sitting beside you and take turns sharing your year in school, hometown, residence hall, and major. Then you may branch out and see if there are any common interests that emerge. Finding out you're both St. Louis Cardinals fans could then lead to more conversation about baseball and other hobbies or interests; however, sometimes the experiment may fail. If your attempts at information exchange with another person during the experimenting stage are met with silence or hesitation, you may interpret their lack of communication as a sign that you shouldn't pursue future interaction.

Experimenting continues in established relationships. Small talk, a hallmark of the experimenting stage, is common among young adults catching up with their parents when they return home for a visit or committed couples when they recount their day while preparing dinner. Small talk can be annoying sometimes, especially if you feel like you have to do it out of politeness. However, small talk serves important functions, such as creating a communicative entry point that can lead people to uncover topics of conversation that go beyond the surface level, helping us audition someone to see if we'd like to talk to them further, and generally creating a sense of ease and community with others. And even though small talk isn't viewed as very substantive, the authors of this model of relationships indicate that most of our relationships do not progress far beyond this point (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009).

Intensifying

As we enter the intensifying stage, we indicate that we would like or are open to more intimacy, and then we wait for a signal of acceptance before we attempt more intimacy. This incremental intensification of intimacy can occur over a period of days, weeks, months, or years and may involve inviting a new friend to join you at a party, then to your place for dinner, then to go on vacation with you. It may be seen as odd, even if the experimenting stage went well, to invite a person who you're still getting to know on vacation with you without engaging in some less intimate interaction beforehand. In order to save face and avoid making ourselves overly vulnerable, steady progression is typically key in this stage. Aside from sharing more intense personal time, requests for and granting favors may also play into intensification of a relationship. For example, one friend helping the other prepare for a big party on their birthday can increase closeness. However, if one person asks for too many favors or fails to reciprocate favors granted, then the relationship can become unbalanced, which could result in a transition to another stage, such as differentiating.

Other signs of the intensifying stage include the creation of nicknames, inside jokes, and personal idioms; increased use of *we* and *our*; increased communication about each other's identities (e.g., "My friends all think you are really laid back and easy to get along with"); and a loosening of typical restrictions on possessions and personal space (e.g., you have a key to your best friend's apartment and can hang out there if your roommate is getting on your nerves). Navigating the changing boundaries between individuals in this stage can be tricky, which can lead to conflict or uncertainty about the relationship's future as new expectations for relationships develop. Successfully managing this increasing closeness can lead to relational integration.

Integrating

In the integrating stage, two people's identities and personalities merge, and a sense of interdependence develops. Even though this stage is most evident in romantic relationships, there are elements that appear in other relationship forms. Some verbal and nonverbal signals of the integrating stage are when the social networks of two people merge; those outside the relationship begin to refer to or treat the relational partners as if they were one person (e.g., always referring to them together—"Let's invite Olaf and Bettina"); or the relational partners present themselves as one unit (e.g., both signing and sending one holiday card or opening a joint bank account). Even as two people integrate, they likely maintain some sense of self by spending time with friends and family separately, which helps balance their needs for independence and connection.

Bonding

The bonding stage includes making a public announcement to the world about their formal commitment. Bonding rituals can include weddings, commitment ceremonies, and civil unions. Obviously, this stage is applicable to romantic couples. However, friends may decide to move in together as a formal commitment to their relationship. In some ways, the bonding ritual is arbitrary, in that it can occur at any stage in a relationship. In fact, bonding rituals are often later annulled or reversed because a relationship doesn't work out, perhaps because there wasn't sufficient time spent in the experimenting or integrating phases. However, bonding warrants its own stage because the symbolic act of bonding can have very real effects on how two people communicate about and perceive their relationship. For example, the formality of the bond may lead the couple and those in their social network to more diligently maintain the relationship if conflict or stress threatens it.

The bonding stage eventually leads to the terminating stage for many relationships, as about 50 percent of marriages in the United States end in divorce (Perman, 2011).

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Differentiating

Individual differences can present a challenge at any given stage in the relational interaction model; however, in the differentiating stage, communicating these differences becomes a primary focus. Differentiating is the reverse of integrating, as *we* and *our* reverts back to *I* and *my*. People may try to reboundary some of their life prior to the integrating of the current relationship, including other relationships or possessions. For example, Carrie may reclaim friends who became "shared" as she got closer to her roommate Julie and their social networks merged by saying, "I'm having *my friends* over to the apartment and would like to have privacy for the evening." Differentiating may onset in a relationship that bonded before the individuals knew each other in enough depth and breadth. Even in relationships where the bonding stage is less likely to be experienced, such as a friendship, unpleasant discoveries about the other person's past, personality, or values during the integrating or experimenting stage could lead a person to begin differentiating.

Circumscribing

To circumscribe means to draw a line around something or put a boundary around it (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2011). So in the circumscribing stage, communication decreases and certain areas or subjects become restricted as individuals verbally close themselves off from each other. They may say things like "I don't want to talk about that anymore" or "You mind your business and I'll mind mine." If one person was more interested in differentiating in the previous stage, or the desire to end the relationship is one-sided, verbal expressions of commitment may go unechoed—for example, when one person's statement, "I know we've had some problems lately, but I still like being with you," is met with silence. Passive-aggressive behavior and withdrawal may occur more frequently in this stage. Once the increase in boundaries and decrease in communication becomes a pattern, the relationship further deteriorates toward stagnation.

Stagnating

During the stagnating stage, the relationship may come to a standstill, as individuals basically wait for the relationship to end. Outward communication may be avoided, but internal communication may be frequent. The relational conflict flaw of mindreading takes place as a person's internal thoughts lead them to avoid communication. For example, a person may think, "There's no need to bring this up again because I know exactly how they'll react!" This stage can be prolonged in some relationships. Parents and children who are estranged, couples who are separated and awaiting a divorce, or friends who want to end a relationship but don't know how to do it may have extended periods of stagnation. Short periods of stagnation may occur right after a failed exchange in the experimental stage, where you may be in a situation that's not easy to get out of, but the person is still there. Although most people don't like to linger in this unpleasant stage, some may do so to avoid potential pain from termination, some may still hope to rekindle the spark that started the relationship, or some may enjoy leading their relational partner on.

Avoiding

Moving to the avoiding stage may be a way to end the awkwardness that comes with stagnation, as people signal that they want to close down the lines of communication. Communication in the avoiding stage can be very direct—"I don't want to talk to you anymore"—or more indirect—"I have to meet someone in a little while, so I can't talk long." While physical avoidance such as leaving a room or requesting a schedule change at work may help clearly communicate the desire to terminate the relationship, we don't always have that option. In a parent-child relationship, where the child is still dependent on the parent, or in a roommate situation, where a lease agreement prevents leaving, people may engage in cognitive dissociation, which means they mentally shut down and ignore the other person even though they are still physically copresent.

Terminating

The terminating stage of a relationship can occur shortly after initiation or after a ten- or twenty-year relational history has been established. Termination can result from outside circumstances such as geographic separation or internal factors such as changing values or personalities that lead to a weakening of the bond. Termination exchanges involve some typical communicative elements and may begin with a summary message that recaps the relationship and provides a reason for the termination (e.g., "We've had some ups and downs over our three years together, but I'm getting ready to go to college, and I either want to be with someone who is willing to support me, or I want to be free to explore who I am."). The summary message may be followed by a distance message that further communicates the relational drift that has occurred (e.g., "We've really grown apart over the past year"), which may be followed by a disassociation message that prepares people to be apart by projecting what happens after the relationship ends (e.g., "I know you'll do fine without me. You can use this time to explore your options and figure out if you want to go to college too or not."). Finally, there is often a message regarding the possibility for future communication in the relationship (e.g., "I think it would be best if we don't see each other for the first few months, but text me if you want to.") (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009). These ten stages of relational development provide insight into the complicated processes that affect relational formation and deterioration. We also make decisions about our relationships by weighing costs and rewards.

Relationship Repair

Relationships in the differentiating, circumscribing, stagnating, and avoiding stages do not always end in termination. Once a relationship has deteriorated, the relational partners may decide to engage in relationship repair. Repair happens both intrapersonally and interpersonally.

Intrapersonal repair happen individually and includes:

- recognizing the relationship needs repair
- engaging in productive communication
- proposing possible solutions
- self-affirmation
- acknowledging risks – take a chance and make the first move
- integrating solutions into your everyday behaviors even though the other partner may not do so (at least initially).

Interpersonal repair happens as a dyad and includes:

- recognize the problem(s)

- participate in productive conflict resolution
- propose possible solutions
- affirm each other during the process
- integrate solutions into their everyday behavior
- acknowledge the risks involved.

Reasons for Initiation, Maintenance, and Termination

Attraction

Have you ever wondered why people pick certain relationships over others? We can't pick our family members, although I know some people wish they could. We can, however, select who our friends and significant others are in our lives. Throughout our lives, we pick and select people that we build a connection to and have an attraction towards. We tend to avoid certain people who we don't find attractive.

Researchers have identified three primary types of attraction: physical, social, and task. *Physical attraction* refers to the degree to which you find another person aesthetically pleasing. What is deemed aesthetically pleasing can alter greatly from one culture to the next. We also know that pop culture can greatly define what is considered to be physically appealing from one era to the next. Think of the curvaceous ideal of Marilyn Monroe and Elizabeth Taylor in the 1950s as compared to the thin Halle Barry or Anne Hathaway. Although discussions of male physical attraction occur less often, they are equally impacted by pop culture. In the 1950s, you had solid men like Robert Mitchum and Marlon Brando as compared to the heavily muscled men of today like Joe Manganiello or Zac Efron.

The second type of attraction is *social attraction*, or the degree to which an individual sees another person as entertaining, intriguing, and fun to be around. We all have finite sources when it comes to the amount of time we have in a given day. We prefer to socialize with people that we think are fun. These people may entertain us or they may just fascinate us. No matter the reason, we find some people more socially desirable than others. Social attraction can also be a factor of power, for example, in situations where there are kids in the "in-group" and those that are not. In this case, those that are considered popular hold more power and are perceived as being more socially desirable to associate with. This relationship becomes problematic when these individuals decide to use this social desirability as a tool or weapon against others.

The final type of attraction is *task attraction*, or people we are attracted to because they possess specific knowledge and/or skills that help us accomplish specific goals. The first part of this definition requires that the target of task attraction possess specific knowledge and/or skills. Maybe you have a friend who is good with computers who will always fix your computer when something goes wrong. Maybe you have a friend who is good at math and can tutor you. Of course, the purpose of these relationships is to help you accomplish your own goals. In the first case, you have the goal of not having a broken down computer. In the second case, you have the goal of passing math. This is not to say that an individual may only be viewed as task attractive, but many relationships we form are because of task attraction in our lives.

Similarities and Differences

It feels comforting when someone who appears to like the same things you like also has other similarities to you. Thus, you don't have to explain yourself or give reasons for doing things a certain way. People with similar cultural, ethnic, or religious backgrounds are typically drawn to each other for this reason. It is also known as *similarity thesis*. The similarity thesis basically states that we are attracted to and tend to form relationships with others who are similar to us. There are three reasons why similarity thesis works: *validation*, *predictability*, *and affiliation*. First, it is validating to know that someone likes the same things that we do. It confirms and endorses what we believe. In turn, it increases support and affection. Second, when we are similar to another person, we can make predictions about what they will like and not like. We can make better estimations and expectations about what the person will do and how they will behave. The third reason is due to the fact that we like others that are similar to us and thus they should like us because we are the same. Hence, it creates affiliation or connection with that other person.

However, there are some people who are attracted to someone completely opposite from who they are. This is where differences come into play. Differences can make a relationship stronger, especially when you have a relationship that is *complementary*. In complementary relationships, each person in the relationship can help satisfy the other person's needs. For instance, one person likes to talk, and the other person likes to listen. They get along great because they can be comfortable in their communication behaviors and roles. In addition, they don't have to argue over who will need to talk. Another example might be that one person likes to cook, and the other person likes to eat. This is a great relationship because both people are getting what they like, and it complements each other's talents. Usually, friction will occur when there are differences of opinion or control issues. For example, if you have someone who loves to spend money and the other person who loves to save money, it might be very hard to decide how to handle financial issues.

Disclosure

Sometimes we form relationships with others after we have disclosed something about ourselves to others. Disclosure increases liking because it creates support and trust between you and this other person. We typically don't disclose our most intimate thoughts to a stranger. We do this behavior with people we are close to because it creates a bond with the other person.

Disclosure is not the only factor that can lead to forming relationships. Disclosure needs to be appropriate and reciprocal. In other words, if you provide information, you typically want information in return. If you reveal too much or too little, it might be regarded as inappropriate and can create tension. Also, if you disclose information too soon or too quickly in the relationship, it can create some negative outcomes.

Social Exchange

Social exchange theory essentially entails a weighing of the costs and rewards in a given relationship (Harvey & Wenzel, 2006). Rewards are outcomes that we get from a relationship that benefit us in some way, while costs range from granting favors to providing emotional support. Rewards could be tangible (e.g., food, money, clothes) or intangible (support, admiration, status). Costs are undesirable things that we don't want to expend a lot of energy to do. For instance, we don't want to have to constantly nag the other person to call us or spend a lot of time arguing about past items. Often, when people decide to stay or leave a relationship, they will consider the costs and rewards in the relationship. When we do not receive the outcomes or rewards that we think we deserve, then we may negatively evaluate the relationship, or at least a given exchange or moment in the relationship, and view ourselves as being under benefited. In an equitable relationship, costs and rewards are balanced, which usually leads to a positive evaluation of the relationship and satisfaction.

Commitment and interdependence are important interpersonal and psychological dimensions of a relationship that relate to social exchange theory. Interdependence refers to the relationship between a person's well-being and involvement in a particular relationship. A person will feel interdependence in a relationship when (1) satisfaction is high or the relationship meets important needs; (2) the alternatives are not good, meaning the person's needs couldn't be met without the relationship; or (3) investment in the relationship is high, meaning that resources might decrease or be lost without the relationship (Harvey & Wenzel, 2006).

We can be cautioned, though, to not view social exchange theory as a tit-for-tat accounting of costs and rewards (Noller, 2006). We wouldn't be very good relational partners if we carried around a little notepad, notating each favor or good deed we completed so we can expect its repayment. We may become aware of the balance of costs and rewards at some point in our relationships, but that awareness isn't persistent because relationships are dynamic. We also have communal relationships, in which members engage in a relationship for mutual benefit and do not expect returns on investments such as favors or good deeds (Harvey & Wenzel, 2006). As the dynamics in a relationship change, we may engage communally without even being aware of it, just by simply enjoying the relationship. It has been suggested that we become more aware of the costs and rewards balance when a relationship is going through conflict (Noller, 2006). Overall, relationships are more likely to succeed when there is satisfaction and commitment, meaning that we are pleased in a relationship intrinsically or by the rewards we receive.

Equity

Equity theory (Adams, 1965) was developed to understand workplace relationships. Adams (1965) asserted that we develop and maintain relationships when the ratio of the rewards and costs *is equal to that of our partners*. This is similar to the Social Exchange theory because it is an economic model. However, it differs in that it acknowledges that cultural values and ideologies influence the decisions we make. The key words here are equal relationships. In relationships, we want to be equally satisfied.

For example, a couple might share workloads equally or split the household expenses equally because doing so satisfies them at the same level. If the balance tips in favor of one over the other, problems may arise. Adams' theory relies on the notion that people value fair treatment and are motivated by it. It is a perceptual theory in that it is the "perceived" equality that makes the difference. If one partner in the previous example perceives that one person is not paying their fair share of the expenses, the relationship can deteriorate.

Perceived Gain

Costs and rewards mentioned above are not the only factors in a relationship. Partners also consider alternatives in the relationship. For instance, Becky and Alan have been together for a few years. Becky adores Alan and wants to marry him, but she feels that there are some problems in the relationship. Alan has a horrible temper; he is pessimistic, and he is critical of her. Becky has gained some weight, and Alan has said some hurtful things to her. Becky knows that every relationship will have issues. She doesn't know whether to continue this relationship and take it further or if she should end it.

Her first alternative is called the *comparison level*(CL), which is the minimum standard that she is willing to tolerate. If Becky believes that it is ok for a person to say hurtful things to her or get angry, then Alan is meeting or exceeding her CL. However, if past romantic partners have never said anything hurtful towards her, then she would have a lower CL.

Becky will also consider another alternative, which is the *comparison level of alternatives* (CL_{alt}), or the comparison between current relationship rewards and what she might get in another relationship. If she doesn't want to be single, then she might have a lower CL of alternatives. If she has another potential mate who would probably treat her better, then she would have a higher level of alternatives. We use this calculation all the time in relationships. Often when people are considering the possibility to end a relationship, they will consider all alternatives rather than just focusing on costs and rewards.

Key Takeaways

- Relationships can be easily distinguished into personal or social and voluntary or involuntary.
- There are stages of relational interaction in which relationships come together (initiating, experimenting, intensifying, integrating, and bonding) and come apart (differentiating, circumscribing, stagnating, avoiding, and terminating).
- There are many reasons we initiate, develop, maintain, and terminate relationships.

Exercises

1. Review the types of relationships in Figure 7.1 "Types of Relationships". Name at least one person from your relationships that fits into each quadrant. How does your communication differ between each

of these people?

2. Pick a relationship important to you and determine what stage of relational interaction you are currently in with that person. What communicative signals support your determination? What other stages from the ten listed have you experienced with this person?
3. How do you weigh the costs and rewards in your relationships? What are some rewards you are currently receiving from your closest relationships? What are some costs?
4. Conduct an inventory of your relationships. Think of all the people in your life and how they meet each of the relationship characteristics.
5. Write a list of all the good relationships that you have with others or witnessed. What makes these relationships good? Is it similar to what we talked about in this chapter? Was anything different? Why?
6. Write a hypothetical relationship article for a website. What elements make a lasting relationship? What would you write? What would you emphasize? Why? Let a friend read it and provide input.

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5.2 Communication and Friends

Learning Objectives

1. Compare and contrast different types of friendships.
2. Describe the cycle of friendship from formation to maintenance to dissolution/deterioration.
3. Discuss how friendships change across the life span, from adolescence to later life.
4. Explain how culture and gender influence friendships.

Do you consider all the people you are "friends" with on Facebook to be friends? What's the difference, if any, between a "Facebook friend" and a real-world friend? Friendships, like other relationship forms, can be divided into categories. What's the difference between a best friend, a good friend, and an old friend? What about work friends, school friends, and friends of the family? It's likely that each of you reading this book has a different way of perceiving and categorizing your friendships. In this section, we will learn about the various ways we classify friends, the life cycle of friendships, and how gender affects friendships.

Defining and Classifying Friends

Friendships are voluntary interpersonal relationships between two people who usually equals and who mutually influence one another (Gruyter, 1992). Friendships are distinct from romantic relationships, family relationships, and acquaintances and are often described as more vulnerable relationships than others due to their voluntary nature, the availability of other friends, and the fact that they lack the social and institutional support of other relationships. The lack of official support for friendships is not universal, though. In rural parts of Thailand, for example, special friendships are recognized by a ceremony in which both parties swear devotion and loyalty to each other (Bleiszner & Adams, 1992). Even though we do not have a formal ritual to recognize friendship in the United States, in general, research shows that people have three main expectations for close friendships. A friend is someone you can talk to, someone you can depend on for help and emotional support, and someone you can participate in activities and have fun with (Rawlins, 1992).

Although friendships vary across the life span, three types of friendships are common in adulthood: reciprocal, associative, and receptive (VanLear, Koerner, Allen, 2006). Reciprocal friendships are solid interpersonal relationships between people who are equals with a shared sense of loyalty and commitment. These friendships are likely to develop over time and can withstand external changes such as geographic separation or fluctuations in other commitments such as work and childcare. Reciprocal friendships are what most people would consider the ideal for best friends. Associative friendships are mutually pleasurable relationships between acquaintances or associates that, although positive, lack the commitment of reciprocal friendships. These friendships are likely to be maintained out of convenience or to meet instrumental goals.

Friendships that are maintained because they are convenient and meet an instrumental need, like having a workout partner, are likely to terminate if they become inconvenient or the need changes.

Marion Doss – Friends – CC BY-SA 2.0.

For example, a friendship may develop between two people who work out at the same gym. They may spend time with each other in this setting a few days a week for months or years, but their friendship might end if the gym closes or one person's schedule changes. Receptive friendships include a status differential that makes the relationship asymmetrical. Unlike the other friendship types that are between peers, this relationship is more like that of a supervisor-subordinate or clergy-parishioner. In some cases, like a mentoring relationship, both parties can benefit from the relationship. In other cases, the relationship could quickly sour if the person with more authority begins to abuse it.

The Life Span of Friendships

Friendships, like most relationships, have a life span ranging from formation to maintenance to deterioration/dissolution. Friendships have various turning points that affect their trajectory. While there are developmental stages in friendships, they may not be experienced linearly, as friends can cycle through formation, maintenance, and deterioration/dissolution together or separately and may experience stages multiple times. Friendships are also diverse, in that not all friendships develop the same level of closeness, and the level of closeness can fluctuate over the course of a friendship. Changes in closeness can be an expected and accepted part of the cycle of friendships, and less closeness doesn't necessarily lead to less satisfaction (Johnson et al., 2003).

The formation process of friendship development involves two people moving from strangers toward acquaintances and potentially friends (Bleiszner & Adams, 1992). Several factors influence the formation of friendships, including environmental, situational, individual, and interactional factors (Fehr, 2000). Environmental factors lead us to have more day-to-day contact with some people over others. For example, residential proximity and sharing a workplace are catalysts for friendship formation. Thinking back to your childhood, you may have had early friendships with people on your block because they were close by and you could spend time together easily without needing transportation. A similar situation may have occurred later if you moved away from home for college and lived in a residence hall.

Many new college students form bonds with people in their residence halls that last through college and beyond.

College friends – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

You may have formed early relationships with classmates. Many students will continue to associate and maybe even attempt to live close to friends they made in their college years. We also find friends through the social networks of existing friends and family. Although these people may not live close to us, they are brought into proximity through people we know, which facilitates our ability to spend time with them. Encountering someone due to environmental factors may lead to a friendship if the situational factors are favorable.

The main situational factor that may facilitate or impede friendship formation is availability. Initially, we are more likely to be interested in a friendship if we anticipate that we'll be able to interact with the other person again in the future without expending more effort than our schedule and other obligations will allow. In order for a friendship to take off, both parties need resources such as time and energy to put into it. Hectic work schedules, family obligations, or personal stresses such as financial problems or family or relational conflict may impair someone's ability to nurture a friendship.

While contact and availability may initiate communication with a potential friend, individual and interactional factors are also important. We are more likely to develop friendships with individuals we deem physically attractive, socially competent, and responsive to our needs (Fehr, 2000). Specifically, we are more attracted to people we deem similar to or slightly above us in terms of attractiveness and competence. Although physical attractiveness is more important in romantic relationships, research shows that we evaluate attractive people more positively, which may influence our willingness to invest more in a friendship. Friendships also tend to form between people with similar demographic characteristics such as race, gender, age, and class, and similar personal characteristics like interests and values. Being socially competent and responsive in terms of empathy, emotion management, conflict management, and self-disclosure also contribute to the likelihood of friendship development.

If a friendship is established in the formation phase, then the new friends will need to maintain their relationship. The maintenance phase includes the most variation in terms of the processes that take place, the commitment to maintenance from each party, and the length of time of the phase (Bleiszner & Adams, 1992). In short, some friendships require more maintenance in terms of shared time together and emotional support than other friendships that can be maintained with only occasional contact. Maintenance is important because friendships provide important opportunities for social support that take the place of or supplement family and romantic relationships. Sometimes, we may feel more comfortable being open with a friend about something than we would with a family member or romantic partner. Most people expect that friends will be there for them when needed, which is the basis of friendship maintenance. As with other relationships, tasks that help maintain friendships range from being there in a crisis to seemingly mundane day-to-day activities and interactions.

Failure to perform or respond to friendship-maintenance tasks can lead to the deterioration and eventual dissolution of friendships. Causes of dissolution may be voluntary (termination due to conflict), involuntary (death of friendship partner), external (increased family or work commitments), or internal (decreased liking due to perceived lack of support) (Bleiszner & Adams, 1992). While there are often multiple, interconnecting causes that result in friendship dissolution, there are three primary sources of conflict in a friendship that stem from internal/interpersonal causes and may lead to voluntary dissolution: sexual interference, failure to support, and betrayal of trust (Fehr, 2000). Sexual interference generally involves a friend engaging with another friend's romantic partner or romantic interest and can lead to feelings of betrayal, jealousy, and anger. Failure to support may entail a friend not coming to another's aid or defense when criticized. Betrayal of trust can stem from failure to secure private information by telling a secret or disclosing personal information without permission. While these three internal factors may initiate conflict in a friendship, the discovery of unfavorable personal traits can also lead to problems.

Have you ever started investing in a friendship only to find out later that the person has some character flaws that you didn't notice before? As was mentioned earlier, we are more likely to befriend someone whose personal qualities we find attractive. However, we may not get to experience the person in a variety of contexts and circumstances before we invest in the friendship. We may later find out that our easygoing friend becomes really possessive once we start a romantic relationship and spend less time with him. Or we may find that our happy-go-lucky friend gets moody and irritable when she doesn't get her way. These individual factors become interactional when our newly realized dissimilarity affects our communication. It is logical that as our liking decreases, as a result of a personal reassessment of the friendship, we will engage in less friendship-maintenance tasks such as self-disclosure and supportive communication. In fact, research shows that the main termination strategy employed to end a friendship is avoidance.

As we withdraw from the relationship, the friendship fades away and may eventually disappear, which is distinct from romantic relationships, which usually have an official "breakup." Aside from changes based on personal characteristics discovered through communication, changes in the external factors that help form friendships can also lead to their dissolution.

The main change in environmental factors that can lead to friendship dissolution is a loss of proximity, which may entail a large or small geographic move or school or job change. The two main situational changes that affect friendships are schedule changes and changes in romantic relationships. Even without a change in environment, someone's job or family responsibilities may increase, limiting the amount of time one has to invest in friendships. Additionally, becoming invested in a romantic relationship may take away from time previously allocated to friends. For environmental and situational changes, the friendship itself is not the cause of the dissolution. These external factors are sometimes difficult if not impossible to control, and lost or faded friendships are a big part of everyone's relational history.

Friendships across the Life Span

As we transition between life stages such as adolescence, young adulthood, emerging adulthood, middle age, and later life, our friendships change in many ways (Rawlins, 1992). Our relationships begin to deepen in adolescence as we negotiate the confusion of puberty. Then, in early adulthood, many people get to explore their identities and diversify their friendship circle. Later, our lives stabilize and we begin to rely more on friendships with a romantic partner and continue to nurture the friendships that have lasted. Let's now learn more about the characteristics of friendships across the life span.

Adolescence

Adolescence begins with the onset of puberty and lasts through the teen years. We typically make our first voluntary close social relationships during adolescence as cognitive and emotional skills develop. At this time, our friendships are usually with others of the same age/grade in school, gender, and race, and friends typically have similar attitudes about academics and similar values (Rawlins, 1992). These early friendships allow us to test our interpersonal skills, which affects the relationships we will have later in life. For example, emotional processing, empathy, self-disclosure, and conflict become features of adolescent friendships in new ways and must be managed (Collins & Madsen, 2006).

Adolescents begin to see friends rather than parents as providers of social support, as friends help negotiate the various emotional problems often experienced for the first time (Collins & Madsen, 2006).

Friendships in adolescence become important as we begin to create an identity that is separate from our family. Young friends – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

This new dependence on friendships can also create problems. For example, as adolescents progress through puberty and forward on their identity search, they may experience some jealousy and possessiveness in their friendships as they attempt to balance the tensions between their dependence on and independence from friends. Additionally, as adolescents articulate their identities, they look for acceptance and validation of self in their friends, especially given the increase in self-consciousness experienced by most adolescents (Rawlins, 1992). Those who do not form satisfying relationships during this time may miss out on opportunities for developing communication competence, leading to lower performance at work or school and higher rates of depression (Collins & Madsen, 2006). The transition to college marks a move from adolescence to early adulthood and opens new opportunities for friendship and challenges in dealing with the separation from hometown friends.

Early Adulthood

Early adulthood encompasses the time from around eighteen to twenty-nine years of age, and although not every person in this age group goes to college, most of the research on early adult friendships focuses on college students. Those who have the opportunity to head to college will likely find a canvas for exploration and experimentation with various life and relational choices relatively free from the emotional, time, and financial constraints of starting their own family that may come later in life (Rawlins, 1992).

As we transition from adolescence to early adulthood, we are still formulating our understanding of relational processes, but people report that their friendships are more intimate than the ones they had in adolescence. During this time, friends provide important feedback on self-concept, careers, romantic and/or sexual relationships, and civic, social, political, and extracurricular activities. It is inevitable that young adults will lose some ties to their friends from adolescence during this transition, which has positive and negative consequences. Investment in friendships from adolescence provides a sense of continuity during the often rough transition to college. These friendships may also help set standards for future friendships, meaning the old friendships are a base for comparison for new friends. Obviously, this is a beneficial situation relative to the quality of the old friendship. If the old friendship was not a healthy one, using it as the standard for new friendships is a bad idea. Additionally, nurturing older friendships at the expense of meeting new people and experiencing new social situations may impede personal growth during this period.

Adulthood

Adult friendships span a larger period of time than the previous life stages discussed, as adulthood encompasses the period from thirty to sixty-five years old (Rawlins, 1992). The exploration that occurs for most middle-class people in early adulthood gives way to less opportunity for friendships in adulthood, as many in this period settle into careers, nourish long-term relationships, and have children of their own. These new aspects of life bring more time constraints and interpersonal and task obligations, and with these obligations comes an increased desire for stability and continuity. Adult friendships tend to occur between people who are similar in terms of career position, race, age, partner status, class, and education level. This is partly due to the narrowed social networks people join as they become more educated and attain higher career positions. Therefore, finding friends through religious affiliation, neighborhood, work, or civic engagement is likely to result in similarity between friends (Bleiszner & Adams, 1992).

Even as social networks narrow, adults are also more likely than young adults to rely on their friends to help them process thoughts and emotions related to their partnerships or other interpersonal relationships (Bleiszner & Adams, 1992). For example, a person may rely on a romantic partner to help process through work relationships and close coworkers to help process through family relationships. Work life and home life become connected in important ways, as career (money making) intersects with and supports the desires for stability (home making) (Rawlins, 1992). Since home and career are primary focuses, socializing outside of those areas may be limited to interactions with family (parents, siblings, and in-laws) if they are geographically close. In situations where family isn't close by, adults' close or best friends may adopt kinship roles, and a child may call a parent's close friend "Uncle Andy" even if they are not related. Spouses or partners are expected to be friends; it is often expressed that the best partner is one who can also serve as best friend, and having a partner as a best friend can be convenient if time outside the home is limited by parental responsibilities. There is not much research on friendships in late middle age (ages fifty to sixty-five), but it has been noted that relationships with partners may become even more important during this time, as parenting responsibilities diminish with grown children and careers and finances stabilize. Partners who have successfully navigated their middle age may feel a bonding sense of accomplishment with each other and with any close friends with whom they shared these experiences (Rawlins, 1992).

Later Life

Friendships in later-life adulthood, which begins in one's sixties, are often remnants of previous friends and friendship patterns.

Those who have typically had a gregarious social life will continue to associate with friends if physically and mentally able, and those who relied primarily on a partner, family, or limited close friends will have more limited, but perhaps equally rewarding, interactions. Friendships that have extended from adulthood or earlier are often "old" or "best" friendships that offer a look into a dyad's shared past. Given that geographic relocation is common in early adulthood, these friends may be physically distant, but if investment in occasional contact or visits preserved the friendship, these friends are likely able to pick up where they left off (Rawlins, 1992). However, biological aging and the social stereotypes and stigma associated with later life and aging begin to affect communication patterns.

Although stereotypes of the elderly often present them as slow or out of touch, many people in later life enjoy the company of friends and maintain active social lives.

Felipe Neves – 3 old friends – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Obviously, our physical and mental abilities affect our socializing and activities and vary widely from person to person and age to age.

Mobility may be limited due to declining health, and retiring limits the social interactions one had at work and work-related events (Bleiszner & Adams, 1992). People may continue to work and lead physically and socially active lives decades past the marker of later life, which occurs around age sixty-five. Regardless of when these changes begin, it is common and normal for our opportunities to interact with wide friendship circles to diminish as our abilities decline. Early later life may be marked by a transition to partial or full retirement if a person is socioeconomically privileged enough to do so. For some, retirement is a time to settle into a quiet routine in the same geographic place, perhaps becoming even more involved in hobbies and civic organizations, which may increase social interaction and the potential for friendships. Others may move to a more desirable place or climate and go through the process of starting over with new friends. For health or personal reasons, some in later life live in assisted-living facilities. Later-life adults in these facilities may make friends based primarily on proximity, just as many college students in early adulthood do in the similarly age-segregated environment of a residence hall (Rawlins, 1992).

Friendships in later life provide emotional support that is often only applicable during this life stage. For example, given the general stigma against aging and illness, friends may be able to shield each other from negative judgments from others and help each other maintain a positive self-concept (Rawlins, 1992). Friends can also be instrumental in providing support after the death of a partner. Men, especially, may need this type of support, as men are more likely than women to consider their spouse their sole confidante, which means the death of the wife may end a later-life man's most important friendship. Women who lose a partner also go through considerable life changes, and in general more women are left single after the death of a spouse than men due to men's shorter life span and the tendency for men to be a few years older than their wives. Given this fact, it is not surprising that widows in particular may turn to other single women for support. Overall, providing support in later life is important given the likelihood of declining health. In the case of declining health, some may turn to family instead of friends for support to avoid overburdening friends with requests for assistance. However, turning to a friend for support is not completely burdensome, as research shows that feeling needed helps older people maintain a positive well-being (Rawlins, 1992).

Gender and Friendship

Gender influences our friendships and has received much attention, as people try to figure out how different men and women's friendships are. There is a conception that men's friendships are less intimate than women's based on the stereotype that men do not express emotions. In fact, men report a similar amount of intimacy in their friendships as women but are less likely than women to explicitly express affection verbally (e.g., saying "I love you") and nonverbally (e.g., through touching or embracing) toward their same-gender friends (Bleiszner & Adams, 1992). This is not surprising, given the societal taboos against same-gender expressions of affection, especially between men, even though an increasing number of men are more comfortable expressing affection toward other men and women. However, researchers have wondered if men communicate affection in more implicit ways that are still understood by the other friend. Men may use shared activities as a way to express closeness—for example, by doing favors for each other, engaging in friendly competition, joking, sharing resources, or teaching each other new skills (Bleiszner & Adams, 1992). Some scholars have argued that there is a bias toward viewing intimacy as feminine, which may have skewed research on men's friendships. While verbal expressions of intimacy through self-disclosure have been noted as important features of women's friendships, activity sharing has been the focus in men's friendships. This research doesn't argue that one gender's friendships are better than the other's, and it concludes that the differences shown in the research regarding expressions of intimacy are not large enough to impact the actual practice of friendships (Monsour, 2006).

Cross-gender friendships are friendships between a male and a female. These friendships diminish in late childhood and early adolescence as boys and girls segregate into separate groups for many activities and socializing, reemerge as possibilities in late adolescence, and reach a peak potential in the college years of early adulthood. Later, adults with spouses or partners are less likely to have cross-sex friendships than single people (Rawlins, 1992). In any case, research studies have identified several positive outcomes of cross-gender friendships. Men and women report that they get a richer understanding of how the other gender thinks and feels (Halatsis & Christakis, 2009). It seems these friendships fulfill interaction needs not as commonly met in same-gender friendships. For example, men reported more than women that they rely on their cross-gender friendships for emotional support (Bleiszner & Adams, 1992). Similarly, women reported that they enjoyed the activity-oriented friendships they had with men (Halatsis & Christakis, 2009).

Key Takeaways

- Friendships are voluntary interpersonal relationships between two people who are usually equals and who mutually influence one another.
- Friendship formation, maintenance, and deterioration/dissolution are influenced by environmental, situational, and interpersonal factors.
- Friendships change throughout our lives as we transition from adolescence to adulthood to later life.
- Cross-gender friendships may offer perspective

into gender relationships that same-gender friendships do not, as both men and women report that they get support or enjoyment from their cross-gender friendships. However, there is a potential for sexual tension that complicates these relationships.

Exercises

1. Have you ever been in a situation where you didn't feel like you could "accept applications" for new friends or were more eager than normal to "accept applications" for new friends? What were the environmental or situational factors that led to this situation?
2. Getting integrated: Review the types of friendships (reciprocal, associative, and receptive). Which of these types of friendships do you have more of in academic contexts and why? Answer the same question for professional contexts and personal contexts.
3. Of the life stages discussed in this chapter, which one are you currently in? How do your friendships match up with the book's description of friendships at this stage? From your experience, do friendships change between stages the way the book says they do? Why or why not?

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5.3 Communication and Families

Learning Objectives

1. Compare and contrast the various definitions of family.
2. Describe various types of family rituals and explain their importance.
3. Explain how conformity and conversation orientations work together to create different family climates.

There is no doubt that the definition and makeup of families are changing in the United States. New data from research organizations and the 2010 US Census show the following: people who choose to marry are waiting longer, more couples are cohabitating (living together) before marriage or instead of marrying, households with more than two generations are increasing, and the average household size is decreasing (Pew Research Center, 2010). Just as the makeup of families changes, so do the definitions.

Defining Family

Who do you consider part of your family? Many people would initially name people who they are related to by blood. You may also name a person with whom you are in a committed relationship—a partner or spouse. But some people have a person not related by blood that they might refer to as *aunt* or *uncle* or even as a brother or sister. We can see from these examples that it's not simple to define a family.

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Families take on many different shapes and sizes. Families - CC

The definitions people ascribe to families usually fall into at least one of the following categories: structural definitions, task-orientation definitions, and transactional definitions (Segrin & Flora, 2005). *Structural definitions* of family focus on form, criteria for membership, and often a hierarchy of family members. One example of a structural definition of family is two or more people who live together and are related by birth, marriage, or adoption. From this definition, a father and son, two cousins, or a brother and sister could be considered a family if they live together. However, a single person living alone or with nonrelated friends, or a couple who chooses not to or are not legally able to marry would not be considered a family. These definitions rely on external, "objective" criteria for determining who is in a family and who is not, which makes the definitions useful for groups like the US Census Bureau, lawmakers, and other researchers who need to define family for large-scale data collection. The simplicity and time-saving positives of these definitions are countered by the fact that many family types are left out in general structural definitions; however, more specific structural definitions have emerged in recent years that include more family forms.

Family of origin refers to relatives connected by blood or other traditional legal bonds such as marriage or adoption and includes parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, nieces, and nephews. Family of orientation refers to people who share the same household and are connected by blood, legal bond, or who act/live as if they are connected by either (Segrin & Flora, 2005). Unlike family of origin, this definition is limited to people who share the same household and represents the family makeup we choose. For example, most young people don't get to choose who they live with, but as we get older, we choose our spouse or partner or may choose to have or adopt children.

There are several subdefinitions of families of orientation (Segrin & Flora, 2005). A *nuclear family* includes two heterosexual married parents and one or more children. While this type of family has received a lot of political and social attention, some scholars argue that it was only dominant as a family form for a brief part of human history (Peterson & Steinmetz, 1999). A *binuclear family* is a nuclear family that was split by divorce into two separate households, one headed by the mother and one by the father, with the original children from the family residing in each home for periods of time. A *single-parent family* includes one parent who may or may not have been previously married with one or more children. A *stepfamily* includes a heterosexual couple that lives together with children from a previous relationship. A *cohabitating family* includes a heterosexual couple who lives together in a committed relationship but does not have a legal bond such as marriage. Similarly, a *gay or lesbian family* includes a couple of the same gender who live together in a committed relationship and may or may not have a legal bond such as marriage, a civil union, or a domestic partnership. Cohabitating families and gay or lesbian families may or may not have children.

Is it more important that the structure of a family matches a definition, or should we define family based on the behavior of people or the quality of their interpersonal interactions? Unlike structural definitions of family, *functional definitions* focus on tasks or interactions within the family unit. *Task-orientation* definitions of family recognize that behaviors like emotional and financial support are more important interpersonal indicators of a family-like connection than biology. In short, anyone who fulfills the typical tasks present in families is considered family. For example, in some cases, custody of children has been awarded to a person not biologically related to a child over a living blood relative because that person acted more like a family member to the child. The most common family tasks include nurturing and socializing other family members. Nurturing family members entails providing basic care and support, both emotional and financial. Socializing family members refers to teaching young children how to speak, read, and practice social skills.

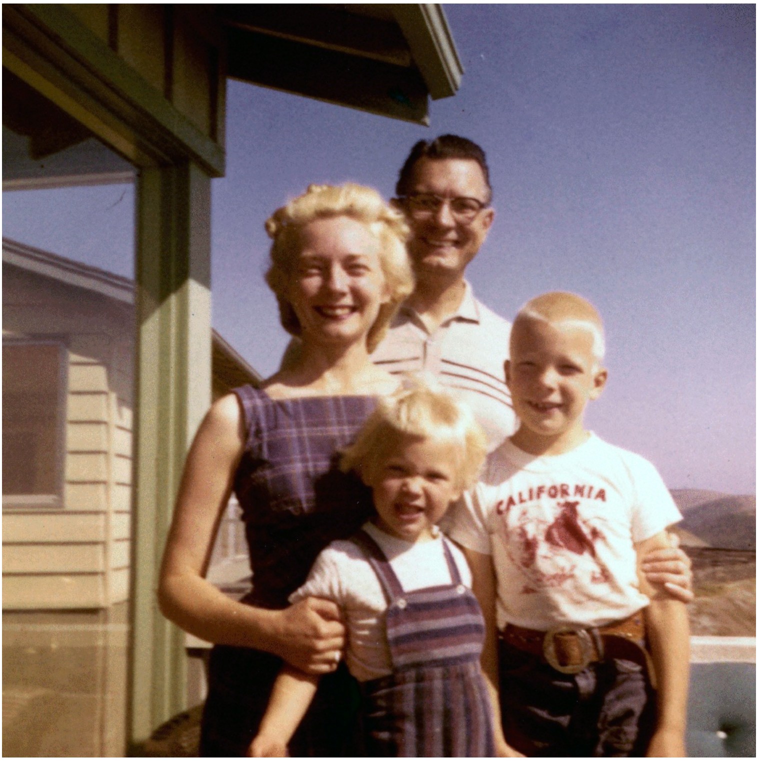
Transactional definitions of family focus on communication and subjective feelings of connection. While task-orientation definitions convey the importance of providing for family members, transactional definitions are concerned with the quality of interaction among family members. Specifically, transactional definitions stress that the creation of a sense of home, group identity, loyalty, and a shared past and future makes up a family. Isn't it true that someone could provide food, shelter, and transportation to school for a child but not create a sense of home? Even though there is no one, all-encompassing definition of *family*, perhaps this is for the best. Given that family is a combination of structural, functional, and communicative elements, it warrants multiple definitions to capture that complexity.

Family Communication Processes

Think about how much time we spend communicating with family members over the course of our lives. As children, most of us spend much of our time talking to parents, grandparents, and siblings. As we become adolescents, our peer groups become more central, and we may even begin to resist communicating with our family during the rebellious teenage years. However, as we begin to choose and form our own families, we once again spend much time engaging in family communication. Additionally, family communication is our primary source of intergenerational communication or communication between people of different age groups.

Family Interaction Rituals

You may have heard or used the term *family time* in your own families. What does *family time* mean? As was discussed earlier, relational cultures are built on interaction routines and rituals. Families also have interaction norms that create, maintain, and change communication climates. The notion of family time hasn't been around for too long but was widely communicated and represented in the popular culture of the 1950s (Daly, 2001). When we think of family time, or *quality time* as it's sometimes called, we usually think of a romanticized ideal of family time spent together.



The nuclear family was the subject of many television shows in the 1950s that popularized the idea of family time.

While family rituals and routines can definitely be fun and entertaining bonding experiences, they can also bring about interpersonal conflict and strife. Just think about Clark W. Griswold's string of well-intentioned but misguided attempts to manufacture family fun in the *National Lampoon's Vacation* series.

Families engage in a variety of rituals that demonstrate symbolic importance and shared beliefs, attitudes, and values. Three main types of relationship rituals are patterned family interactions, family traditions, and family celebrations (Wolin & Bennett, 1984). Patterned *family interactions* are the most frequent rituals and do not have the degree of formality of traditions or celebrations. Patterned interactions may include mealtime, bedtime, receiving guests at the house, or leisure activities. Mealtime rituals may include a rotation of who cooks and who cleans, and many families have set seating arrangements at their dinner table.

Family traditions are more formal, occur less frequently than patterned interactions, vary widely from family to family, and include birthdays, family reunions, and family vacations. Birthday traditions may involve a trip to a favorite restaurant, baking a cake, or hanging streamers. Family reunions may involve making t-shirts for the group or counting up the collective age of everyone present. Family road trips may involve predictable conflict between siblings or playing car games like "I spy" or trying to find the most number of license plates from different states.

Last, *family celebrations* are also formal, have more standardization between families, may be culturally specific, help transmit values and memories through generations, and include rites of passage and religious and secular holiday celebrations. Thanksgiving, for example, is formalized by a national holiday and is celebrated in similar ways by many families in the United States. Rites of passage mark life-cycle transitions such as graduations, weddings, quinceañeras, or bar mitzvahs. While graduations are secular and may vary in terms of how they are celebrated, quinceañeras have cultural roots in Latin America, and bar mitzvahs are a long-established religious rite of passage in the Jewish faith.

Conversation and Conformity Orientations

The amount, breadth, and depth of conversation between family members vary from family to family. Additionally, some families encourage self-exploration and freedom, while others expect family unity and control. This variation can be better understood by examining two key factors that influence family communication: conversation orientation and conformity orientation (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). A given family can be higher or lower on either dimension and how a family rates on each of these dimensions can be used to determine a family type.

To determine *conversation orientation*, we determine to what degree a family encourages members to interact and communicate (converse) about various topics. Members within a family with a high conversation orientation communicate with each other freely and frequently about activities, thoughts, and feelings. This unrestricted communication style leads to all members, including children, participating in family decisions. Parents in *high conversation orientation* families believe that communicating with their children openly and frequently leads to a more rewarding family life and helps to educate and socialize children, preparing them for interactions outside the family. Members of a family with a *low conversation orientation* do not interact with each other as often, and topics of conversation are more restricted, as some thoughts are considered private. For example, not everyone's input may be sought for decisions that affect everyone in the family, and open and frequent communication is not deemed important for family functioning or for a child's socialization.

Conformity orientation is determined by the degree to which a family communication climate encourages conformity and agreement regarding beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). A family with a high conformity orientation fosters a climate of uniformity, and parents decide guidelines for what to conform to. Children are expected to be obedient, and conflict is often avoided to protect family harmony. This more traditional family model stresses interdependence among family members, which means space, money, and time are shared among immediate family, and family relationships take precedent over those outside the family. A family with a low conformity orientation encourages diversity of beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors and assertion of individuality. Relationships outside the family are seen as important parts of growth and socialization, as they teach lessons about and build confidence for independence. Members of these families also value personal time and space.

"Getting Real"

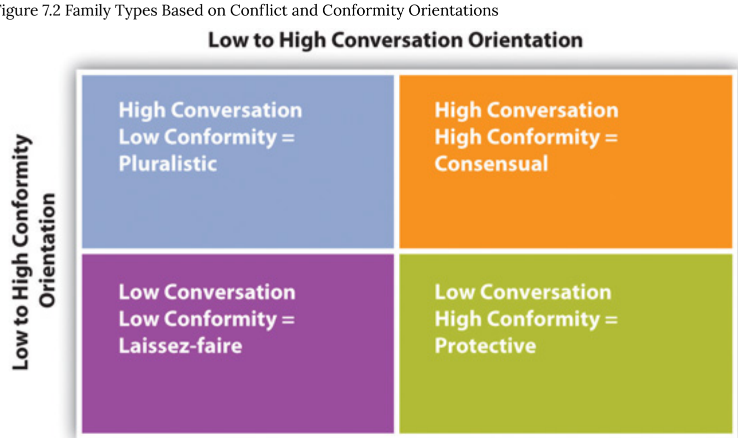
Family Therapists

Family therapists provide counseling to parents, children, romantic partners, and other members of family units (Career Cruising, 2011). People may seek out a family therapist to deal with difficult past experiences or current problems such as family conflict, emotional processing related to grief or trauma, marriage/relationship stresses, children's behavioral concerns, and so on. Family therapists are trained to assess the systems of interaction within a family through counseling sessions that may be one-on-one or with other family members present. The therapist then evaluates how a family's patterns are affecting the individuals within the family. Whether through social services or private practice, family therapy is usually short term. Once the assessment and evaluation is complete, goals are established and sessions are scheduled to track the progress toward completion. The demand for family therapists remains strong, as people's lives grow more complex, careers take people away from support networks such as family and friends, and economic hardships affect interpersonal relationships. Family therapists usually have bachelor's and master's degrees and must obtain a license to practice in their state. More information about family and marriage therapists can be found through their professional organization, the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, at http://www.aamft.org.

1. List some issues within a family that you think should be addressed through formal therapy. List some issues within a family that you think should be addressed directly with/by family members. What is the line that distinguishes between these two levels?
2. Based on what you've read in this book so far, what communication skills do you think would be most beneficial for a family therapist to possess and why?

Determining where your family falls on the conversation and conformity dimensions is more instructive when you know the family types that result, which are consensual, pluralistic, protective, and laissez-faire (see Figure 7.2 "Family Types Based on Conflict and Conformity Orientations") (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). A *consensual family* is high in both conversation and conformity orientations, and they encourage open communication but also want to maintain the hierarchy within the family that puts parents above children. This creates some tension between a desire for both openness and control. Parents may reconcile this tension by hearing their children's opinions, making the ultimate decision themselves, and then explaining why they made the decision they did. A *pluralistic family* is high in conversation orientation and low in conformity. Open discussion is encouraged for all family members, and parents do not strive to control their children's or each other's behaviors or decisions. Instead, they value the life lessons that a family member can learn by spending time with non–family members or engaging in self-exploration. A *protective family* is low in conversation orientation and high in conformity, expects children to be obedient to parents and does not value open communication. Parents make the ultimate decisions and may or may not feel the need to share their reasoning with their children. If a child questions a decision, a parent may simply respond with "Because I said so." A *laissez-faire family* is low in conversation and conformity orientations, has infrequent and/or short interactions, and doesn't discuss many topics. Remember that pluralistic families also have a low conformity orientation, which means they encourage children to make their own decisions in order to promote personal exploration and growth. Laissez-faire families are different in that parents don't have an investment in their children's decision making, and in general, members in this type of family are "emotionally divorced" from each other (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002).

Figure 7.2 Family Types Based on Conflict and Conformity Orientations



Key Takeaways

- There are many ways to define a family.

- Structural definitions focus on form of families and have narrow criteria for membership.
- Task-orientation definitions focus on behaviors like financial and emotional support.
- Transactional definitions focus on the creation of subjective feelings of home, group identity, and a shared history and future.

- Family rituals include patterned interactions like a nightly dinner or bedtime ritual, family traditions like birthdays and vacations, and family celebrations like holidays and weddings.

- Conversation and conformity orientations play a role in the creation of family climates.

  - *Conversation orientation* refers to the degree to which family members interact and communicate about various topics.
  - *Conformity orientation* refers to the degree to which a family expects uniformity of beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors.
  - Conversation and conformity orientations intersect to create the following family climates: consensual, pluralistic, protective, and laissez-faire.

Exercises

1. Of the three types of definitions for families (structural, task-orientation, or transactional), which is most important to you and why?
2. Identify and describe a ritual you have experienced for each of the following: patterned family interaction, family tradition, and family celebration. How did each of those come to be a ritual in your family?
3. Think of your own family and identify where you would fall on the conversation and conformity orientations. Provide at least one piece of evidence to support your decision.

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5.4 Romantic Relationships

Learning Objectives

1. Discuss the influences on attraction and romantic partner selection.
2. Discuss the differences between passionate, companionate, and romantic love.
3. Explain how social networks affect romantic relationships.
4. Explain how sexual orientation and race and ethnicity affect romantic relationships.

Romance has swept humans off their feet for hundreds of years, as is evidenced by countless odes written by love-struck poets, romance novels, and reality television shows like *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette*. Whether pining for love in the pages of a diary or trying to find a soul mate from a cast of suitors, love and romance can seem to take us over at times. As we have learned, communication is the primary means by which we form, maintain, and end our relationships. In this section, we will explore the communicative aspects of romantic relationships including love, sex, social networks, and cultural influences.

Relationship Formation and Maintenance

Much of the research on romantic relationships distinguishes between premarital and marital couples. However, given the changes in marriage and the diversification of recognized ways to couple, we will use the distinctions: dating, cohabitating, and partnered couples. The category for *dating couples* encompasses the courtship period, which may range from a first date through several years. Once a couple moves in together, they fit into the category of *cohabitating couple*. *Partnered couples* take additional steps to verbally, ceremonially, or legally claim their intentions to be together in a long-term committed relationship. The romantic relationships people have before they become partnered provide important foundations for later relationships. But how do we choose our romantic partners, and what communication patterns affect how these relationships come together and apart?

Family background, values, physical attractiveness, and communication styles are just some of the factors that influence our selection of romantic relationships (Segrin & Flora, 2005). *Attachment theory* relates to the bond that a child feels with their primary caregiver. Research has shown that the attachment style (secure, anxious, or avoidant) formed as a child influences adult romantic relationships. Other research shows that adolescents who feel like they have a reliable relationship with their parents feel more connection and attraction in their adult romantic relationships (Seiffge-Krenke, Shulman, & Kiessinger, 2001). Aside from attachment, which stems more from individual experiences as a child, *relationship values*, which stem more from societal expectations and norms, also affect romantic attraction.

We can see the important influence that communication has on the way we perceive relationships by examining the ways in which relational values have changed over recent decades. Over the course of the twentieth century, for example, the preference for chastity as a valued part of relationship selection decreased significantly. While people used to indicate that it was very important that the person they partner with not have had any previous sexual partners, today people list several characteristics they view as more important in mate selection (Segrin & Flora, 2005). In addition, characteristics like income and cooking/housekeeping skills were once more highly rated as qualities in a potential mate. More recently, mutual attraction and love are the top mate-selection values.

"Getting Critical"

Arranged Marriages

Although romantic love is considered a precursor to marriage in Western societies, this is not the case in other cultures. As was noted earlier, mutual attraction and love are the most important factors in mate selection in research conducted in the United States. In some other countries, like China, India, and Iran, mate selection is primarily decided by family members and may be based on the evaluation of a potential partner's health, financial assets, social status, or family connections. In some cases, families make financial arrangements to ensure the marriage takes place. Research on marital satisfaction of people in autonomous (self-chosen) marriages and arranged marriages has been mixed, but a recent study found that there was no significant difference in marital satisfaction between individuals in marriages of choice in the United States and those in arranged marriages in India (Myers, Madathil, & Tingle, 2005). While many people undoubtedly question whether a person can be happy in an arranged marriage, in more collectivistic (group-oriented) societies, accommodating family wishes may be more important than individual preferences. Rather than love leading up to a marriage, love is expected to grow as partners learn more about each other and adjust to their new lives together once married.

1. Do you think arranged marriages are ethical? Why or why not?
2. Try to step back and view both types of marriages from an outsider's perspective. The differences between the two types of marriage are fairly clear, but in what ways are marriages of choice and arranged marriages similar?
3. List potential benefits and drawbacks of marriages of choice and arranged marriages.

Love and Sexuality in Romantic Relationships

When most of us think of romantic relationships, we think about love. However, love did not need to be a part of a relationship for it to lead to marriage until recently. In fact, marriages in some cultures are still arranged based on pedigree (family history) or potential gain in money or power for the couple's families. Today, love often doesn't lead directly to a partnership, given that most people don't partner with their first love. Love, like all emotions, varies in intensity and is an important part of our interpersonal communication.

To better understand love, we can make a distinction between passionate love and companionate love (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2000). *Passionate love* entails an emotionally charged engagement between two people that can be both exhilarating and painful. For example, the thrill of falling for someone can be exhilarating, but feelings of vulnerability or anxiety that the love may not be reciprocated can be painful. *Companionate love* is affection felt between two people whose lives are interdependent. For example, romantic partners may come to find a stable and consistent love in their shared time and activities together. The main idea behind this distinction is that relationships that are based primarily on passionate love will terminate unless the passion cools overtime into a more enduring and stable companionate love. This doesn't mean that passion must completely die out for a relationship to be successful long term. In fact, a lack of passion could lead to boredom or dissatisfaction. Instead, many people enjoy the thrill of occasional passion in their relationship but may take solace in the security of a love that is more stable. While companionate love can also exist in close relationships with friends and family members, passionate love is often tied to sexuality present in romantic relationships.

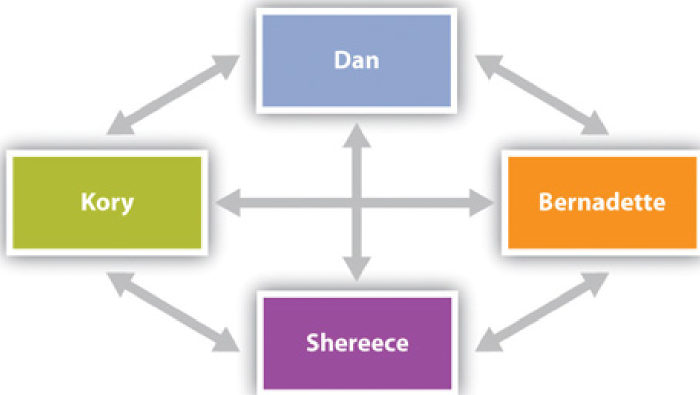
There are many ways in which sexuality relates to romantic relationships and many opinions about the role that sexuality should play in relationships, but this discussion focuses on the role of sexuality in attraction and relational satisfaction. Compatibility in terms of sexual history and attitudes toward sexuality are more important predictors of relationship formation. For example, if a person finds out that a romantic interest has had a more extensive sexual history than their own, they may not feel compatible, which could lessen attraction (Sprecher & Regan, 2000). Once together, considerable research suggests that a couple's sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction are linked such that sexually satisfied individuals report a higher quality relationship, including more love for their partner and more security in the future success of their relationship (Sprecher & Regan, 2000). While sexual activity often strengthens emotional bonds between romantic couples, it is clear that romantic emotional bonds can form in the absence of sexual activity and sexual activity is not the sole predictor of relational satisfaction. In fact, sexual communication may play just as important a role as sexual activity. Sexual communication deals with the initiation or refusal of sexual activity and communication about sexual likes and dislikes (Sprecher & Regan, 2000). For example, a sexual communication could involve a couple discussing a decision to abstain from sexual activity until a certain level of closeness or relational milestone (like marriage) has been reached. Sexual communication could also involve talking about sexual likes and dislikes. Sexual conflict can result when couples disagree over frequency or type of sexual activities. Sexual conflict can also result from jealousy if one person believes their partner is focusing sexual thoughts or activities outside of the relationship. While we will discuss jealousy and cheating more in the section on the dark side of relationships, it is clear that love and sexuality play important roles in our romantic relationships.

Romantic Relationships and Social Networks

Social networks influence all our relationships but have gotten special attention in research on romantic relations. Romantic relationships are not separate from other interpersonal connections to friends and family. Is it better for a couple to share friends, have their own friends, or attempt a balance between the two? Overall, research shows that shared social networks are one of the strongest predictors of whether or not a relationship will continue or terminate.

Network overlap refers to the number of shared associations, including friends and family, that a couple has (Milardo & Helms-Erikson, 2000). For example, if Dan and Shereece are both close with Dan's sister Bernadette, and all three of them are friends with Kory, then those relationships completely overlap (see Figure 7.3 "Social Network Overlap").

Figure 7.3 Social Network Overlap



Network overlap creates some structural and interpersonal elements that affect relational outcomes. Friends and family who are invested in both relational partners may be more likely to support the couple when one or both parties need it. In general, having more points of connection to provide instrumental support through the granting of favors or emotional support in the form of empathetic listening and validation during times of conflict can help a couple manage common stressors of relationships that may otherwise lead a partnership to deteriorate (Milardo & Helms-Erikson, 2000).

In addition to providing a supporting structure, shared associations can also help create and sustain a positive relational culture. For example, mutual friends of a couple may validate the relationship by discussing the partners as a "couple" or "pair" and communicate their approval of the relationship to the couple separately or together, which creates and maintains a connection (Milardo & Helms-Erikson, 2000). Being in the company of mutual friends also creates positive feelings between the couple, as their attention is taken away from the mundane tasks of work and family life. Imagine Dan and Shereece host a board-game night with a few mutual friends in which Dan wows the crowd with charades, and Kory says to Shereece, "Wow, he's really on tonight. It's so fun to hang out with you two." That comment may refocus attention onto the mutually attractive qualities of the pair and validate their continued interdependence.

"Getting Plugged In"

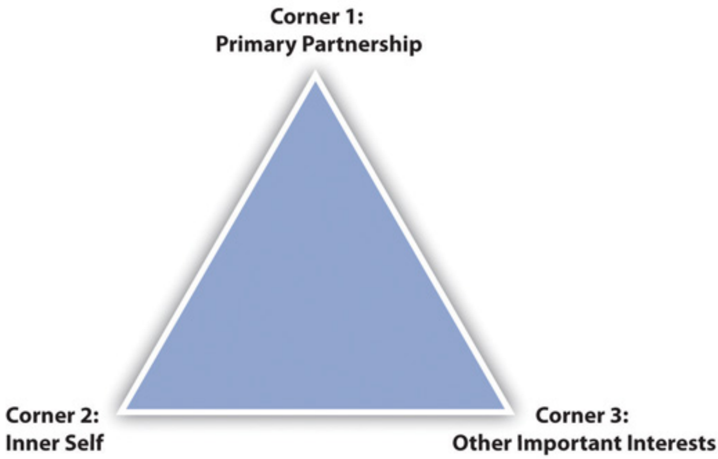
Online Dating

It is becoming more common for people to initiate romantic relationships through the Internet, and online dating sites are big business, bringing in $470 million a year (Madden & Lenhart, 2006). Whether it's through sites like Match.com or OkCupid.com or through chat rooms or social networking, people are taking advantage of some of the conveniences of online dating. But what are the drawbacks?

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of online dating?
2. What advice would you give a friend who is considering using online dating to help him or her be a more competent communicator?

Interdependence and relationship networks can also be illustrated through the theory of triangles (see Figure 7.4 "Theory of Triangles"), which examines the relationship between three domains of activity: the primary partnership (corner 1), the inner self (corner 2), and important outside interests (corner 3) (Marks, 1986).

Figure 7.4 Theory of Triangles



All of the corners interact with each other, but it is the third corner that connects the primary partnership to an extended network. For example, the inner self (corner 2) is enriched by the primary partnership (corner 1) but also gains from associations that provide support or a chance for shared activities or recreation (corner 3) that help affirm a person's self-concept or identity. Additionally, the primary partnership (corner 1) is enriched by the third-corner associations that may fill gaps not met by the partnership. When those gaps are filled, a partner may be less likely to focus on what they're missing in their primary relationship. However, the third corner can also produce tension in a relationship if, for example, the other person in a primary partnership feels like they are competing with their partner's third-corner relationships. During times of conflict, one or both partners may increase their involvement in their third corner, which may have positive or negative effects. A strong romantic relationship is good, but research shows that even when couples are happily married they reported loneliness if they were not connected to friends. While the dynamics among the three corners change throughout a relationship, they are all important.

Dating Relationships

We talk of dating as a single construct a lot of the time without really thinking through how dating has changed over time. In the 20th Century alone, we saw dating go from a highly formalized structure involving calling cards and sitting rooms and dinner dates; to more casual structures like movies and coffee; to cyberdating with people we've never met. The 21st Century has already changed how people date through social networking sites and geolocation dating apps on smartphones.

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Dating is not a single thing and has changed with the times.

So, with all of this change, how does one even begin to know if someone's on a date in the first place? Thankfully Paul Mongeau, Janet Jacobsen, and Carolyn Donnerstein have attempted to answer this question for us. The researchers found that there are five of what they called “supracategories” that help define the term “date”: communication expectations, date goals, date elements, dyadic, and feelings. First, dating involves specific communication expectations. For example, people expect that there will be a certain level of self-disclosure on a date. Furthermore, people expect that their dating partner will be polite, relaxed, and social. Second, dating involves specific date goals, or people on dates have specific goals (e.g., future romantic relationships, reduce uncertainty, have fun). Third, there are specific date elements. For example, someone has to initiate the date; we get ready for a date, we know when the date has started and stopped, there are activities that constitute the date, etc. Fourth, dates are dyadic, or dating is a couple-based activity. Now, this doesn’t necessarily take into account the idea of “group dates,” but even on a group date traditionally there are dyadic couples that are involved in the date itself. Lastly, dates involve feelings. “These feelings range from affection (nonromantic feelings or behaviors), attraction (physical and/or emotional attraction toward the partner), to romantic (dates have romantic overtones).” [29]

Dating Scripts

All of us are going to spend a portion of our lives in some kind of dating relationship. Whether we are initiating dates, dating, or terminating relationships, we spend a great deal of time dating. Match.com publishes an annual study examining singles in the United States (https://www.singlesinamerica.com/). According to data from 2018,30 here are some of the realities of modern single life:

• 55.8% did not go on any first dates, while only 12.6% went on one first date.

• Of those who went on a first date, 20.3% met the person on an online dating site/app while 15.6% met the person through a friend.

- When it comes to being passionately in love, 19.4% have never been in love, 27.3% have been in love once, and 27.7% have been in love twice.
- 25.1% have a “checklist” when it comes to finding a long-term romantic partner.
- 66.7% believe that loving someone is hard work.
- 75.2% believe that love is a possibility for them.
- 83.5% believe that love is hard to find in today’s world.
- 32.4% of dating partners have disagreed on how to label their relationship, and 23.0% have left a relationship over this disagreement.
- When it comes to first dates, participants preferred either quick and easy (36.0%, e.g., coffee, drinks) or more formal (21%, e.g., dinner, brunch).
- 38.1% had been in a “friends with benefits” relationship.
- 28.3% had a friendship that turned into a significant romantic relationship.
- 41.1% have dated someone they met online.
- 48.9% had created at least one profile on a dating website or app.

Admittedly, this study is probably pretty heterosexist because the data were not broken down by sexual orientation. Furthermore, we don’t have similar data for bisexual, gay, and lesbian couples. Dating is one of those things we will spend a lot of time doing before we ever settle down and get married (assuming you ever do or have a desire to do so). So, one must imagine that with so much dating going on in the world, we’d have a pretty good grasp of how dating works.

Robert Abelson originally proposed the idea of script theory back in the late 1970s. He defined a script as a “coherent sequence of events expected by the individual, involving him as either a participant or an observer” (Abelson, 1970). According to *script theory*, people tend to pattern their responses and behaviors during different social interactions to take control of that situation. This does require an individual to be able to imagine their past, present, and future behavior to create this script. In 1993, Suzanna Rose and

Irene Frieze applied Abelson's notions of script theory to dating. They had college students keep records of what they did on a date. Ultimately, two different scripts were derived: one for men and one for women. The male script consisted of 15 different behavioral actions (all initiated by the male):

1. Picked up date
2. Met parents/roommates
3. Left
4. Picked up friends
5. Confirmed plans
6. Talked, joked, laughed
7. Went to movies, show, party
8. Ate
9. Drank alcohol
10. Initiated sexual contact
11. Made out
12. Took date home
13. Asked for another date
14. Kissed goodnight
15. Went home

Women's scripts, on the other hand, contained both behavioral actions for themselves and behavioral
actions they expected of the man during the date:

1. Groomed and dressed
2. Was nervous
3. Picked up date (male)
4. Introduced to parents, etc.
5. Courtly behavior (open doors–male)
6. Left
7. Confirmed plans
8. Got to know & evaluate date
9. Talked, joked, laughed
10. Enjoyed date
11. Went to movies, show, party

12. Ate
13. Drank alcohol
14. Talked to friends
15. Had something go wrong
16. Took date home (male)
17. Asked for another date (male)
18. Told date will call her (male)
19. Kissed date goodnight (male)

Take a second and go through these two lists. Do you think they still apply today? How do you think these scripts differ? Once again, these dating scripts were created only using heterosexual college students. Do you think these scripts change with homosexual or bisexual couples? What about with differing cultures? Or if you have people dating in their late 20s or 30s? What about people who date in their 70s, 80s, or 90s?

There has been subsequent research in the area of dating scripts. Table 8.1 demonstrates some of the other dating scripts that researchers have found (this is not an exhaustive list).

Table 8.1 Dating Scripts – (M) denotes male behavior

First Date[36]	Gay Men[37]	Lesbians[38]	Deaf College Students[39]
• Get ready • Pick up date (M) • Feel nervous • Go to movie • Pay (M) • Talk • Hold hands • Go to café/ party • Nonverbal closeness • Talk • Drink alcohol • Touch/hug • Deep conversation • Mingle with others • Talk • Leave party • Invite the other in • Walk/drive home (M) • Polite leave-taking • Kiss • Future plans • Part for the night (M)	• Discussed plans • Was nervous • Groomed/ dressed • Went to date's house/ picked up date • Met at pre-arranged location • Left one location for another • Got to know /evaluated date • Talked/ laughed/ joked • Talked to friends while on date • Went to a movie, show, etc. • Ate/drank non-alcohol • Drank alcohol/used drugs • Initiated physical contact • Made out • Had sex • Stayed over • Made plans for another date • Went home	• Discussed plans • Was nervous • Groomed/ dressed • Prepared (cleaned apt., bought flowers, etc.) • Went to date's house/ picked up date • Left • Got to know/ evaluated date • Talked/ laughed/ joked • Went to a movie, show, etc. • Ate/drank non-alcohol • Positive affect • Drank alcohol/ used drugs • Initiated physical contact • Kissed/ hugged goodnight • Took date home • Went home • Evaluated feelings post-date	• Initiation/ meeting ◦ Talk ◦ Shared interest ◦ Family and friends • Meet in public • Date activities • Group activities • Dinner • Movie • Talk • Outcomes/ • conclusions • Good night kiss • Take date home • Hug • Relationship development

We often think of dating as something that occurs purely among young people before they get married, but we know people in all age groups date and are looking for romantic relationships of all shapes and sizes.

One other facet of script theory that is very important to consider is how we learn these scripts in the first place. As you read through both the male and female dating script, did you consciously think about how you learned to date? Of course not! However, we've been conditioned since we were very young to date. We've listened to adults tell stories of dating. We've watched dating as it is fictionalized on television and in movies. Dating narratives surround us, and all of these narratives help create the dating scripts that we have. Although dating may feel like you're making it up as you go along, you already possess a treasure trove of information about how dating works. Thankfully, because we have these cultural images of dating presented to us, we also know that our dating partner (as long as they are from a similar culture) will have similar dating scripts.

Love Styles

An individual's love style is considered to be an attitude and describes how love is perceived (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1988). Attitudes toward love and perceptions of love may change throughout an individual's life. College students may perceive love very differently from their parents or guardians because college students are in a very different stage of life. College students are living among people their age who are more than likely single or unmarried. These two factors mean that there are more prospects for dating, and this may lead the college student to conclude that dating any number of these prospects is necessary or even perceive that "hooking up" with multiple prospects is acceptable. In contrast, individuals with children who are financially tied may view romantic relationships as partnerships in which goal achievement (pay off the house, send kids to college, pay off debt, etc.) is as important as romance. These differences in perceptions of love can be explored through John Lee's love typology in which he discusses six love styles: eros, storge, ludus, agape, pragma, and mania (Figure 8.3) (Lee, 1977).

Figure 8.3 Love Styles

Eros

Eros is romance and emphasizes love and physical beauty, immediate attraction, emotional intensity, and strong commitment. Eros love involves the early initiation of sexual intimacy and consecutive monogamous relationships.

Storge

Storge love develops slowly out of friendship where stability and psychological closeness are valued along with commitment, which leads to enduring love. Passion and intense emotions are not valued as they are in the eros love style. One of the author's uncles was in his 60s and had never been married. However, he employed a woman who cooked and cleaned for him for over 20 years. His family was very surprised to receive an announcement that he was marrying the individual who took care of him for so long. The formation of their love is a great example of love that arises slowly out of friendship.

Ludic

Ludic lovers view love as a game, and playing this game with multiple partners is perceived to be acceptable by individuals with this love style. As such, this type of lover believes that deception and manipulation are acceptable. Individuals with this love style have a low tolerance for commitment, jealousy, and strong emotional attachment.

Agape

In contrast, *agape* love involves altruism, giving, and other-centered love. This love style approaches relationships in a non-demanding style with gentle caring and tolerance for others.

Pragma

Pragma love is known as practical love involving logic and reason. Arranged marriages were often arranged for functional purposes. Kings and Queens of different countries often married to form alliances. This love style may seek out a romantic partner for financial stability, ability to parent, or simple companionship.

Mania

Mania is the final love style characterized by dependence, uncertainty, jealousy, and emotional upheaval. This type of love is insecure and needs constant reassurance.

These love styles should not be considered to be mutually independent. An individual may approach love from a pragmatic stance and have found love that provides financial stability. However, they still feel insecure (representative of mania) about whether their romantic partner will remain with them, thus ensuring continued financial stability. It is important to remember that individuals engage in each of these love styles, and it is simply a matter of how much of each love style a person possesses.

Key Takeaways

- Romantic relationships include dating, cohabitating, and partnered couples.
- Family background, values, physical attractiveness, and communication styles influence our attraction to and selection of romantic partners.
- Passionate, companionate, and romantic love and sexuality influence relationships.
- Network overlap is an important predictor of relational satisfaction and success.
- Mongeau, Jacobsen, and Donnerstein defined the term "dating" by identifying a series of "supracategories" that help define the term: communication expectations, date goals, date elements, dyadic, and feelings.
- The idea of script theory was originally proposed by Abelson who defined the concept of scripts as sequences of events expected by a participant or an observer. Dating scripts, therefore, are patterns of behavior that are expected during a "date."
- There are six different love styles. Eros is romance and emphasizes love and physical beauty, immediate

attraction, emotional intensity, and strong commitment. Second, storge love develops slowly out of friendship where stability and psychological closeness are valued along with commitment, which leads to enduring love. Third, ludic lovers view love as a game, and playing this game with multiple partners is perceived to be acceptable by individuals with this love style. Fourth, agape love involves altruism, giving, and other-centered love. Fifth, pragma love is known as practical love involving logic and reason. Lastly, mania love is characterized by dependence, uncertainty, jealousy, and emotional upheaval.

Exercises

1. In terms of romantic attraction, which adage do you think is more true and why? "Birds of a feather flock together" or "Opposites attract."
2. List some examples of how you see passionate and companionate love play out in television shows or movies. Do you think this is an accurate portrayal of how love is experienced in romantic relationships? Why or why not?
3. Social network overlap affects a romantic relationship in many ways. What are some positives and negatives of network overlap?
4. Compare a current or past romantic relationship to the definition of romantic

relationships provided in this chapter. What are the similarities and differences in
your romantic relationship?

5. List the physical features you find attractive. List the personality factors you find attractive. Would you have a romantic relationship with someone who possessed the personality characteristics you find attractive, but not the physical characteristics? Why or why not? Now, consider whether you would have a romantic relationship with someone physically attractive, but who did not possess the personality characteristics you find attractive. Would you have a romantic relationship with this individual? Why or why not?
6. List and define each love style. List the love style of each of your parents and grandparents. Explain how your love style developed and whether it was learned from a family member or innate.

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5.5 Self-Disclosure

Learning Objectives

1. Define self-disclosure.
2. Explain the connection between social penetration theory, social comparison theory, and self-disclosure.
3. Discuss the process of self-disclosure, including how we make decisions about what, where, when, and how to disclose.
4. Explain how self-disclosure affects relationships.

Have you ever said too much on a first date? At a job interview? To a professor? Have you ever posted something on Facebook only to return later to remove it? When self-disclosure works out well, it can have positive effects on interpersonal relationships. Conversely, self-disclosure that does not work out well can lead to embarrassment, lower self-esteem, and relationship deterioration, or even termination. As with all other types of communication, increasing your competence regarding self-disclosure can have many positive effects.

So what is self-disclosure? It could be argued that any verbal or nonverbal communication reveals something about the self. The clothes we wear, a laugh, or an order at the drive-through may offer glimpses into our personality or past, but they are not necessarily self-disclosure. *Self-disclosure* is purposeful disclosure of personal information to another person. If I purposefully wear the baseball cap of my favorite team to reveal my team loyalty to a new friend, then this clothing choice constitutes self-disclosure. Self-disclosure doesn't always have to be deep to be useful or meaningful. Superficial self-disclosure, often in the form of "small talk," is key in initiating relationships that then move onto more personal levels of self-disclosure. Telling a classmate your major or your hometown during the first week of school carries relatively little risk but can build into a friendship that lasts beyond the class.

Theories of Self-Disclosure

Social penetration theory states that as we get to know someone, we engage in a reciprocal process of self-disclosure that changes in breadth and depth and affects how a relationship develops. *Depth* refers to how personal or sensitive the information is, and *breadth* refers to the range of topics discussed (Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006). You may recall Shrek's declaration that ogres are like onions in the movie *Shrek*. While certain circumstances can lead to a rapid increase in the depth and/or breadth of self-disclosure, the theory states that in most relationships people gradually penetrate through the layers of each other's personalities like we peel the layers from an onion.

Social penetration theory compares the process of self-disclosure to peeling back the layers of an onion.

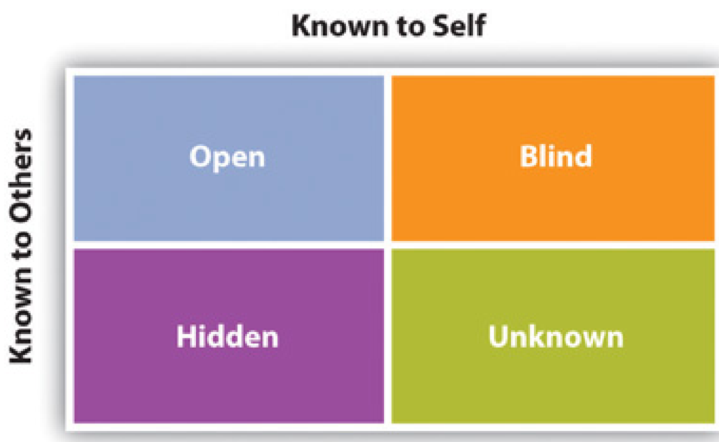
Helena Jacoba – Red Onion close up – CC BY 2.0.

The theory also argues that people in a relationship balance needs that are sometimes in tension, which is a dialectic. Balancing a dialectic is like walking a tightrope. You have to lean to one side and eventually lean to another side to keep yourself balanced and prevent falling. The constant back and forth allows you to stay balanced, even though you may not always be even, or standing straight up. One of the key dialectics that must be negotiated is the tension between openness and closedness (Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006). We want to make ourselves open to others, through self-disclosure, but we also want to maintain a sense of privacy.

We may also engage in self-disclosure for the purposes of social comparison. *Social comparison theory* states that we evaluate ourselves based on how we compare with others (Hargie, 2011). We may disclose information about our intellectual aptitude or athletic abilities to see how we relate to others. This type of comparison helps us decide whether we are superior or inferior to others in a particular area. Disclosures about abilities or talents can also lead to self-validation if the person to whom we disclose reacts positively. By disclosing information about our beliefs and values, we can determine if they are the same as or different from others. Last, we may disclose fantasies or thoughts to another to determine whether they are acceptable or unacceptable. We can engage in social comparison as the discloser or the receiver of disclosures, which may allow us to determine whether or not we are interested in pursuing a relationship with another person.

The final theory of self-disclosure that we will discuss is the *Johari window*, which is named after its creators Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham (Luft, 1969). The Johari window can be applied to a variety of interpersonal interactions in order to help us understand what parts of ourselves are open, hidden, blind, and unknown. To help understand the concept, think of a window with four panes. As you can see in Figure 6.2 "Johari Window", one axis of the window represents things that are known to us, and the other axis represents things that are known to others. The upper left pane contains open information that is known to us and to others. The amount of information that is openly known to others varies based on relational context. When you are with close friends, there is probably a lot of information already in the open pane, and when you are with close family, there is also probably a lot of information in the open pane. The information could differ, though, as your family might know much more about your past and your friends more about your present. Conversely, there isn't much information in the open pane when we meet someone for the first time, aside from what the other person can guess based on our nonverbal communication and appearance.

Figure 6.2 Johari Window



Source: Joseph Luft, *Of Human Interaction* (Palo Alto, CA: National Press Books, 1969).

The bottom left pane contains hidden information that is known to us but not to others. As we are getting to know someone, we engage in self-disclosure and move information from the "hidden" to the "open" pane. By doing this, we decrease the size of our hidden area and increase the size of our open area, which increases our shared reality. The reactions that we get from people as we open up to them help us form our self-concepts and also help determine the trajectory of the relationship. If the person reacts favorably to our disclosures and reciprocates disclosure, then the cycle of disclosure continues and a deeper relationship may be forged.

The upper right pane contains information that is known to others but not to us. For example, we may be unaware of the fact that others see us as pushy or as a leader. People who have a disconnect between how they see themselves and how others see them may have more information in their blind pane. Engaging in perception checking and soliciting feedback from others can help us learn more about our blind area.

The bottom right pane represents our unknown area, as it contains information not known to ourselves or others. To become more self-aware, we must solicit feedback from others to learn more about our blind pane, but we must also explore the unknown pane. To discover the unknown, we have to get out of our comfort zones and try new things. We have to pay attention to the things that excite or scare us and investigate them more to see if we can learn something new about ourselves. By being more aware of what is contained in each of these panes and how we can learn more about each one, we can more competently engage in self-disclosure and use this process to enhance our interpersonal relationships.

"Getting Plugged In"

Self-Disclosure and Social Media

Facebook and Twitter are undoubtedly dominating the world of online social networking, and the willingness of many users to self-disclose personal information ranging from moods to religious affiliation, relationship status, and personal contact information has led to an increase in privacy concerns. Facebook and Twitter offer convenient opportunities to stay in touch with friends, family, and coworkers, but are people using them responsibly? Some argue that there are fundamental differences between today's digital natives, whose private and public selves are intertwined through these technologies, and older generations (Kornblum, 2007). Even though some colleges are offering seminars on managing privacy online, we still hear stories of self-disclosure gone wrong, such as the football player from the University of Texas who was kicked off the team for posting racist comments about the president or the student who was kicked out of his private, Christian college after a picture of him dressed in drag surfaced on Facebook. However, social media experts say these cases are rare and that most students are aware of who can see what they're posting and the potential consequences (Nealy, 2009). The issue of privacy management on Facebook is affecting parent-child relationships, too, and as the website "Oh Crap. My Parents Joined Facebook." shows, the results can sometimes be embarrassing for the college student and the parent as they balance the dialectic between openness and closedness once the child has moved away.

1. How do you manage your privacy and self-disclosures online?
2. Do you think it's ethical for school officials or potential employers to make admission or hiring decisions based on what they can learn about you online? Why or why not?
3. Are you or would you be friends with a parent on Facebook? Why or why not? If you already are friends with a parent, did you change your posting habits or privacy settings once they joined? Why or why not?

The Process of Self-Disclosure

There are many decisions that go into the process of self-disclosure. We have many types of information we can disclose, but we have to determine whether or not we will proceed with disclosure by considering the situation and the potential risks. Then we must decide when, where, and how to disclose. Since all these decisions will affect our relationships, we will examine each one in turn.

Four main categories for disclosure include observations, thoughts, feelings, and needs (Hargie, 2011). *Observations* include what we have done and experienced. For example, you may tell someone that you live in a farmhouse in Illinois. If they said that the move from the city to the country was a good decision, they would be sharing my thoughts, because they included a judgment about my experiences. *Sharing feelings* includes expressing an emotion—for example, “I’m happy to wake up every morning and look out at the corn fields. I feel lucky.” Last, we may communicate *needs* or *wants* by saying something like “My best friend is looking for a job, and I really want him to move here, too.” We usually begin disclosure with observations and thoughts and then move on to feelings and needs as the relationship progresses. There are some exceptions to this. For example, we are more likely to disclose deeply in crisis situations, and we may also disclose more than usual with a stranger if we do not think we’ll meet the person again or do not share social networks. Although we don’t often find ourselves in crisis situations, you may recall scenes from movies or television shows where people who are trapped in an elevator or stranded after a plane crash reveal their deepest feelings and desires. I imagine that we have all been in a situation where we said more about ourselves to a stranger than we normally would. To better understand why, let’s discuss some of the factors that influence our decision to disclose.

Reasons for Self-disclosure

Generally speaking, some people are naturally more transparent and willing to self-disclose, while others are more opaque and hesitant to reveal personal information (Jourard, 1964). Interestingly, recent research suggests that the pervasiveness of reality television, much of which includes participants who are very willing to disclose personal information, has led to a general trend among reality television viewers to engage in self-disclosure through other mediated means such as blogging and video sharing (Stefanone & Lakaff, 2009). Whether it is online or face-to-face, there are other reasons for disclosing or not, including self-focused, other-focused, interpersonal, and situational reasons (Green, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006).

Self-focused reasons for disclosure include having a sense of relief or catharsis, clarifying or correcting information, or seeking support. Self-focused reasons for not disclosing include fear of rejection and loss of privacy. In other words, we may disclose to get something off our chest in hopes of finding relief, or we may not disclose out of fear that the other person may react negatively to our revelation. *Other-focused reasons* for disclosure include a sense of responsibility to inform or educate. Other-focused reasons for not disclosing include feeling like the other person will not protect the information. If someone mentions that their car wouldn't start this morning and you disclose that you are good at working on cars, you've disclosed to help out the other person. On the other side, you may hold back disclosure about your new relationship from your coworker because he or she's known to be loose-lipped with other people's information. *Interpersonal reasons* for disclosure involve desires to maintain a trusting and intimate relationship. Interpersonal reasons for not disclosing include fear of losing the relationship or deeming the information irrelevant to the particular relationship. Your decision to disclose an affair in order to be open with your partner and hopefully work through the aftermath together or withhold that information out of fear he or she will leave you is based on interpersonal reasons. Finally, *situational reasons* may be the other person being available, directly asking a question, or being directly involved in or affected by the information being disclosed. Situational reasons for not disclosing include the person being unavailable, a lack of time to fully discuss the information, or the lack of a suitable (i.e., quiet, private) place to talk. For example, finding yourself in a quiet environment where neither person is busy could lead to disclosure, while a house full of company may not.

Deciding when to disclose something in a conversation may not seem as important as deciding whether or not to disclose at all. But deciding to disclose and then doing it at an awkward time in a conversation could lead to negative results. As far as timing goes, you should consider whether to disclose the information early, in the middle, or late in a conversation (Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006). If you get something off your chest early in a conversation, you may ensure that there's plenty of time to discuss the issue and that you don't end up losing your nerve. If you wait until the middle of the conversation, you have some time to feel out the other person's mood and set up the tone for your disclosure. For example, if you meet up with your roommate to tell her that you're planning on moving out and she starts by saying, "I've had the most terrible day!" the tone of the conversation has now shifted, and you may not end up making your disclosure. If you start by asking her how she's doing, and things seem to be going well, you may be more likely to follow through with the disclosure. You may choose to disclose late in a conversation if you're worried about the person's reaction. If you know they have an appointment or you have to go to class at a certain time, disclosing just before that time could limit your immediate exposure to any negative reaction. However, if the person doesn't have a negative reaction, they could still become upset because they don't have time to discuss the disclosure with you.

Sometimes self-disclosure is unplanned. Someone may ask you a direct question or disclose personal information, which leads you to reciprocate disclosure. In these instances you may not manage your privacy well because you haven't had time to think through any potential risks. In the case of a direct question, you may feel comfortable answering, you may give an indirect or general answer, or you may feel enough pressure or uncertainty to give a dishonest answer. If someone unexpectedly discloses, you may feel the need to reciprocate by also disclosing something personal. If you're uncomfortable doing this, you can still provide support for the other person by listening and giving advice or feedback.

Once you've decided when and where to disclose information to another person, you need to figure out the best channel to use. Face-to-face disclosures may feel more genuine or intimate given the shared physical presence and ability to receive verbal and nonverbal communication. There is also an opportunity for immediate verbal and nonverbal feedback, such as asking follow-up questions or demonstrating support or encouragement through a hug. The immediacy of a face-to-face encounter also means you have to deal with the uncertainty of the reaction you'll get. If the person reacts negatively, you may feel uncomfortable, pressured to stay, or even fearful. If you choose a mediated channel such as an e-mail or a letter, text, note, or phone call, you may seem less genuine or personal, but you have more control over the situation in that you can take time to carefully choose your words, and you do not have to immediately face the reaction of the other person. This can be beneficial if you fear a negative or potentially violent reaction. Another disadvantage of choosing a mediated channel, however, is the loss of nonverbal communication that can add much context to a conversation. Although our discussion of the choices involved in self-disclosure so far have focused primarily on the discloser, self-disclosure is an interpersonal process that has much to do with the receiver of the disclosure.

Effects of Disclosure on the Relationship

The process of self-disclosure is circular. An individual self-discloses, the recipient of the disclosure reacts, and the original discloser processes the reaction. How the receiver interprets and responds to the disclosure are key elements of the process. Part of the response results from the receiver's attribution of the cause of the disclosure, which may include dispositional, situational, and interpersonal attributions (Jiang, Bazarova, & Hancock, 2011). Let's say your coworker discloses that she thinks the new boss got his promotion because of favoritism instead of merit. You may make a dispositional attribution that connects the cause of her disclosure to her personality by thinking, for example, that she is outgoing, inappropriate for the workplace, or fishing for information. If the personality trait to which you attribute the disclosure is positive, then your reaction to the disclosure is more likely to be positive. Situational attributions identify the cause of a disclosure with the context or surroundings in which it takes place. For example, you may attribute your coworker's disclosure to the fact that you agreed to go to lunch with her. Interpersonal attributions identify the relationship between sender and receiver as the cause of the disclosure. So if you attribute your coworker's comments to the fact that you are best friends at work, you think your unique relationship caused the disclosure. If the receiver's primary attribution is interpersonal, relational intimacy and closeness will likely be reinforced more than if the attribution is dispositional or situational, because the receiver feels like they were specially chosen to receive the information.

The receiver's role doesn't end with attribution and response. There may be added burdens if the information shared with you is a secret. As was noted earlier, there are clear risks involved in self-disclosure of intimate or potentially stigmatizing information if the receiver of the disclosure fails to keep that information secure. As the receiver of a secret, you may feel the need to unburden yourself from the co-ownership of the information by sharing it with someone else (Derlega, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993). This is not always a bad thing. You may strategically tell someone who is removed from the social network of the person who told you the secret to keep the information secure. Although unburdening yourself can be a relief, sometimes people tell secrets they were entrusted to keep for less productive reasons. A research study of office workers found that 77 percent of workers that received a disclosure and were told not to tell anyone else told at least two other people by the end of the day (Hargie, 2011). They reported doing so to receive attention for having inside information or to demonstrate their power or connection. Needless to say, spreading someone's private disclosure without permission for personal gain does not demonstrate communication competence.

When the cycle of disclosure ends up going well for the discloser, there is likely to be a greater sense of relational intimacy and self-worth, and there are also positive psychological effects such as reduced stress and increased feelings of social support. Self-disclosure can also have effects on physical health. Spouses of suicide or accidental death victims who did not disclose information to their friends were more likely to have more health problems such as weight change and headaches and suffer from more intrusive thoughts about the death than those who did talk with friends (Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006).

Benefits & Risks of Self-Disclosure

Benefits

- **catharsis –** "get it off your chest", reveal regrets, mental and emotional relief
- **reciprocity –** one act of self-disclosure leads to another, no guarantee though, honesty creates a safe climate
- **self clarification –** clarify beliefs, opinions, thoughts, attitudes, feelings by talking about them. "talk the problem out"
- **self validation –** seeking validation of out behavior. "Did I do the right thing?"
- **identity management –** make ourselves more attractive, marketing ourselves, more attractive, likable, sensitive. Ex: when on a date
- **relationship maintenance and enhancement –** relational success
- **social influence –** revealing can increase control over the

other and/or situation

Motives for Self-Disclosure can vary. Motives for self-disclosure may include:

Disclosure to a Friend – strengthen friendship, friendship maintenance and enhancement
Disclosure as Self Clarification – sort out any confusion, Ex: "I was at my boyfriend's last night, not at the party"
Disclosure to a Stranger – reciprocity most common way to get to know them, also impression formation used in a positive way to make one look good

Risks

- **rejection –** fear of disapproval, dangers in being too revealing. Can be exaggerated and/or illogical. Ex: "I like you more than just a friend" "let's spend some time apart"
- **negative impression –** Ex: not wanting to tell a new friend about when you broke the law and got into trouble
- **decrease in relational satisfaction –** Ex: "I think you are too clingy" "But I like being close to you…"
- **loss of influence –** confessing a weakness to another person can lead to them viewing you differently. Ex: a manager confesses they have no real control about wages resulting in employees viewing the manager as weak
- **hurting the other person –** Ex: :"I'm fat and my diet isn't working" "Yeah, you should get a new one"

Self-disclosure is so important that websites have been created for people to share secrets anonymously:

Postsecret-A website that showcases secrets that people anonymously send in via creative postcards. Website wildly popular, at least 1 million users a week.

F My Life -A website where users anonymously tell their FML stories and can judge if "yes your life sucks" or "you deserve it"

Alternatives to Self-Disclosure

So, if you don't want to self-disclose to others, what are some techniques that you can use? First, you can use deception. Sometimes people lie simply to avoid conflict. This is true in cases where the person may become extremely upset. They can lie to gain power or to save face. They can also lie to guide the interaction.

Second, you can *equivocate*. This means you don't answer the question or provide your comments. Rather, you simply restated what they said differently. For instance, Sally says, "how do you like my new dress?", you can say "Wow! That's a new outfit!" In this case, you don't provide how you feel, and you don't disclose your opinion. You only offer the information that has been provided to you.

Third, you can hint. Perhaps, you don't want to lie or equivocate to someone you care about. You might use indirect or face-saving comments. For example, if your roommate has not helped you clean your apartment, you might say things like, "It sure is messy in here" or "This place could really use some cleaning."

Key Takeaways

- Through the process of self-disclosure, we disclose personal information and learn about others.

- The social penetration theory argues that self-disclosure increases in breadth and depth as a relationship progresses, like peeling back the layers of an onion.
- We engage in social comparison through self-disclosure, which may determine whether or not we pursue a relationship.
- Getting integrated: The process of self-disclosure involves many decisions, including what, when, where, and how to disclose. All these decisions may vary by context, as we follow different patterns of self-disclosure in academic, professional, personal, and civic contexts.
- The receiver's reaction to and interpretation of self-disclosure are important factors in how the disclosure will affect the relationship.

Exercises

1. Answer the questions from the beginning of the section: Have you ever said too much on a first date? At a job interview? To a professor? Have you ever posted something on Facebook only to return later to remove it? If you answered yes to any of the questions, what have you learned in this chapter that may have led you to do something differently?
2. Have you experienced negative results due to self-disclosure (as sender or receiver)? If so, what could

have been altered in the decisions of what, where, when, or how to disclose that may have improved the situation?

3. Under what circumstances is it OK to share information that someone has disclosed to you? Under what circumstances is to not OK to share the information?

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5.6 Mediated Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Explain the history of computer-mediated communication.
2. Differentiate between synchronous and asynchronous communication.
3. Explain netiquette.
4. Describe online impression formation.
5. Describe the absence of nonverbal cues in online communication.

Interpersonal Communication in Mediated Contexts

In today's world, we all spend a lot of time on various devices designed to make our lives easier. From smartphones to social media, we are all in constant contact with family, friends, coworkers, etc. Since the earliest days of communication technologies, we have always used these technologies to interact with one another. This chapter will examine how technology mediates our interpersonal relationships.

We stay connected with others via different forms of technology.

Allowing People to Communicate

The early Internet was not exactly designed for your average user, so it took quite a bit of skill and “know how” to use the Internet and find information. Of course, while the Internet was developing, so was its capability for allowing people to communicate and interact with one another. In 1971, Ray Tomlinson sent a message from one computer to another computer sitting right next to it, sending the message through ARPANET and creating the first electronic email. In addition to email, another breakthrough in computer-mediated communication was the development of Internet forums or message/bulletin boards, which are online discussion sites where people can hold conversations in the form of posted messages. As you can see, from the earliest days of the Internet, people were using the Internet as a tool to communicate and interact with people who had similar interests. Today, there are hundreds of ways to connect with others in an online environment.

Synchronous and Asynchronous Communication

Synchronous communication happens in real time, like having a class discussion in a face-to-face setting or talking to a someone after class. But you can communicate synchronously in an online environment too, through the use of tools like online chat; Internet voice of video calling systems like Skype or Google Hang-outs; or through the use of web-based video conferencing software like WebEx, Zoom, or Collaborate. Another popular form of synchronous online communication is gaming. For example, in Figure 12.5, Sam and Pat are in some kind of underworld, fiery landscape. Pat is playing a witch character, and Sam is playing a vampire character. The two can coordinate their movements to accomplish in-game tasks because they can talk freely to one another while playing the game in real time.

Figure 12.5 Video Game Play

Conversely, *asynchronous communication* is the exchange of messages with a time lag. In other words, in asynchronous communication, people can communicate on their own schedules as time permits instead of in real time. For example, Figure 12.6 shows a conversation between two college students. In this case, two college students are using SMS, commonly called texting) to interact with each other. The conversation starts at 2:25 PM. The first person initiates the conversation but doesn't get a response until 3:05 PM. The third turn in the interaction then doesn't happen until 5:40 PM. In this exchange, the two people interacting can send responses at their convenience, which is one of the main reasons people often rely on asynchronous communication. Other common forms of asynchronous communication include emails, instant messaging, and online discussions.

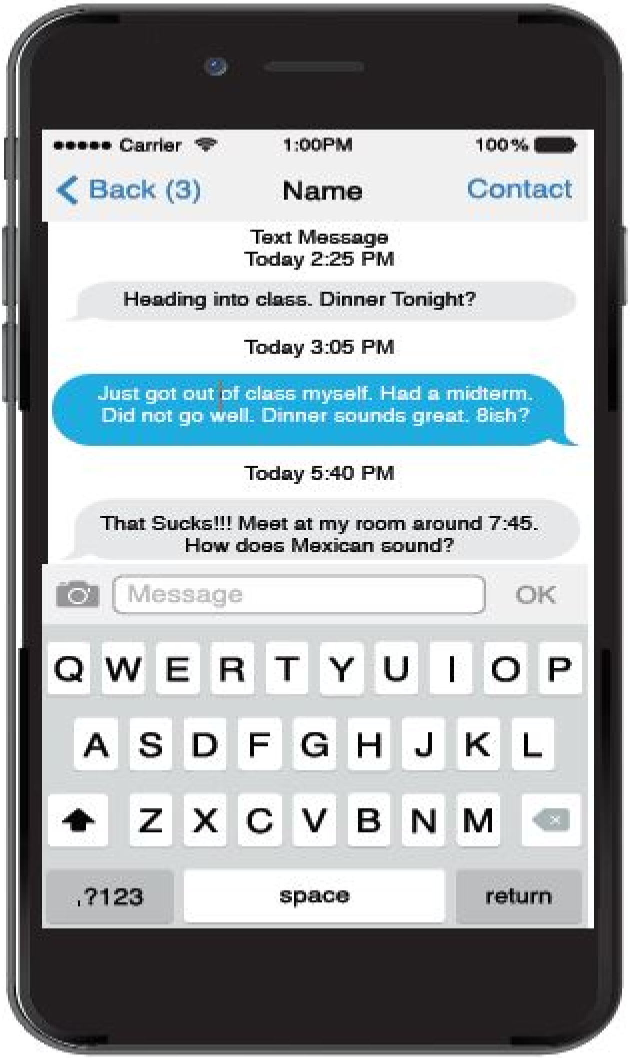

Figure 12.6 Asynchronous Communication via MS (Text Messaging)

Netiquette

Over the years, numerous norms have developed to help individuals communicate in the CMC context. They're so common that we have a term for them, netiquette. Netiquette is the set of professional and social rules and norms that are considered acceptable and polite when interacting with another person(s) through mediating technologies. Let's break down this definition.

Contexts

First, our definition of netiquette emphasizes that different contexts can create different netiquette needs. Specifically, how one communicates professionally and how one communicates socially are often quite different. For example, you may find it entirely appropriate to say, "What's up?!" at the beginning of an email to a friend, but you would not find it appropriate to start an email to your boss in this same fashion. Furthermore, it may be entirely appropriate to downplay or disregard spelling errors or grammatical problems in a text you send to a friend, but it is completely inappropriate to have those same errors and problems in a text sent to a professional-client or coworker. One of the biggest challenges many employers have with young employees who are fresh out of college is that they don't know how to differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate communicative behavior in differing contexts. This lack of professionalism is also a problem commonly discussed by college and university faculty and staff. Think about the last email you sent to one of your professors? Was this email professional? Did you remember to sign your name? You'd be amazed at the lack of professionalism many college and university faculty and staff see in the emails sent by your peers.

Here are some general guidelines for sending professional emails:

- Include a concise, direct subject line.

• Do not mark something as “urgent” unless it really is.
• Begin with a proper greeting (Dear Mr. X, Professor Y:, etc.)
• Double-check your grammar.
• Correct any spelling mistakes.
• Include only essential information. Be concise.
• State your intention clearly and directly.
• Make sure your message is logically organized.
• Be polite and ensure your tone is appropriate.
• Avoid all CAPS or all lowercase letters.
• Avoid “textspeak” (e.g., plz, lol)
• If you want the recipient to do something, make the desired action very clear.
• End with a polite closing (using “please” and “thank you”).
• Do not send an email if you’re angry or upset.
• Edit and proofread before hitting “send.”
• Use “Reply All” selectively (very selectively)

Rules and Norms

Second, our definition of netiquette combines both rules and norms. Part of being a competent communicator in a CMC environment is knowing what the rules are and respecting them. For example, if you know that Twitter’s rules ban hate speech, then engaging in hate speech using the Twitter platform shows a disregard for the rules and would not be considered appropriate behavior. In essence, hate speech is anti-netiquette. We also do not want to ignore the fact that in different CMC contexts, different norms often develop. For example, maybe you’re taking an online course and you’re required to engage in weekly discussions. One common norm in an online class is to check the previous replies to a post before posting your reply. If you don’t, then you are jumping into a conversation that’s already occurred and throwing your two-cents in without knowing what’s happening.

Acceptable and Polite CMC Behavior

Third, netiquette attempts to govern what is both acceptable and polite. Yelling via a text message may be
acceptable to some of your friends, but is it polite given that typing in all caps is generally seen as yelling?
Being polite shows others respect and demonstrates socially appropriate behaviors.

If you've spent any time online recently, you may have noticed that it can definitely feel like a cesspool. There are many trolls, making the Internet a place where civil interactions are hard to come by. Mitch Abblett came up with five specific guidelines for interacting with others online:

1. Be kind and compassionately courteous with all posts and comments.
2. No hate speech, bullying, derogatory or biased comments regarding self, others in the community, or others in general.
3. No Promotions or Spam.
4. Do not give mental health advice.
5. Respect everyone's privacy and be thoughtful in the nature and depth of your sharing.[14]

Think about your interactions with others in the online world. Have you ever communicated with others without considering whether your own intentions and attitude are appropriate?

Online Interaction

Fourth, our definition involves interacting with others. This interaction can be one-on-one, or this interaction can be one-to-many. The first category, one-on-one, is more in the wheelhouse of interpersonal communication. Examples include sending a text to one person, sending an email to one person, talking to one person via Skype or Zoom, etc. The second category, one-to-many, requires its own set of rules and norms. Some examples of common one-to-many CMC could include engaging in a group chat via texting, "replying all" to an email received, being interviewed by a committee via Skype, etc. Notice that our examples for one-to-many involve the same technologies used for one-on-one communication. However, the norms may be different for each.

Range of Mediating Technologies

Lastly, netiquette can vary based on the different types of mediating technologies. For example, it may be considered entirely appropriate for you to scream, yell, and curse when your playing with your best friend on Fortnite, but it wouldn't be appropriate to use the same communicative behaviors when engaging in a video conference over Skype. Both technologies use VoIP, but the platforms and the contexts are very different, so they call for different types of communicative behaviors. Some differences will exist in netiquette based on whether you're in an entirely text-based medium (e.g., email, texting) or one where people can see you (e.g., Skype, WebEx, Zoom). Ultimately, engaging in netiquette requires you to learn what is considered acceptable and polite behavior across a range of different technologies.

Online Identity

Online Impression Formation

In the 21st Century, so much of what we do involves interacting with people online. How we present ourselves to others through our online persona (impression formation) is very important. How we communicate via social media and how professional our online persona is can be determining factors in getting a job.

It's important to understand that in today's world, anything you put online can be found by someone else. According to the 2018 CareerBuilder.com social recruiting survey, a survey of more than 1,000 hiring managers, 70% admit to screening potential employees using social media, and 66% use search engines to look up potential employees. In fact, having an online persona can be very beneficial. Fortyseven percent of hiring managers admit to not calling a potential employee when the employee does not have an online presence. You may be wondering what employers are looking for when they check out potential employees online. The main things employers look for are information to support someone's qualifications (58%), whether or not an individual has a professional online persona (50%), to see what others say about the potential candidate (34%), and information that could lead a hiring manager to decide not to hire someone (22%).22 According to CareerBuilder.com, here are the common reasons someone doesn't get a job because of her/his/their online presence:

- Job candidate posted provocative or inappropriate photographs, videos or information: 40 percent
- Job candidate posted information about their alcohol of drug use: 36 percent
- Job candidate made discriminatory comments related to race, gender, religion, etc.: 31 percent
- Job candidate was linked to criminal behavior: 30 percent
- Job candidate lied about qualifications: 27 percent
- Job candidate had poor communication skills: 27 percent
- Job candidate bad-mouthed their previous company or fellow employee: 25 percent
- Job candidate's screen name was unprofessional: 22 percent
- Job candidate shared confidential information from previous employers: 20 percent
- Job candidate lied about an absence: 16 percent
- Job candidate posted too frequently: 12 percent[23]

As you can see, having an online presence is important in the 21st Century. Some people make the mistake of having no social media presence, which can backfire. In today's social media society, having no online presence can look very strange to hiring managers. You should consider your social media presence as an extension of your resume. At the very least, you should have a profile on LinkedIn, the social networking site most commonly used by corporate recruiters.

Types of Online Identities

Unlike traditional face to face interactions, online interactions can blur identities as people act in ways impossible in face to face interaction. Andrew F. Wood and Matthew J. Smith discussed three different ways that people express their identities online: anonymous, pseudonymous, and real life (Figure 12.9).[49]

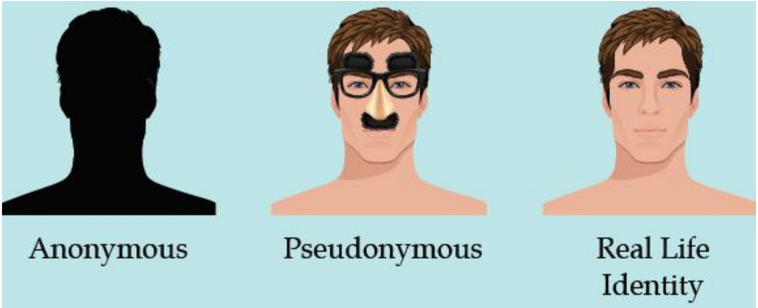

Figure 12.9 Types of Online Identities

Anonymous Identity

First, people in a CMC context can behave in a way that is completely anonymous. In this case, people in CMC interactions can communicate in a manner that conceals their actual identity. Now, it may be possible for some people to figure out who an anonymous person is (e.g., the NSA, the CIA), but if someone wants to maintain her or his anonymity, it's usually possible to do so. Think about how many fake Facebook, Twitter, Tinder, and Grindr accounts exist. Some exist to try to persuade you to go to a website (often for illicit purposes like hacking your computer), while others may be "catfishing" for the fun of it.

Catfishing is a deceptive activity perpetrated by Internet predators when they fabricate online identities on social networking sites to lure unsuspecting victims into an emotional/romantic relationship. In the 2010 documentary Catfish, we are introduced to Yaniv "Nev" Schulman, a New York-based photographer, who starts an online relationship with an 8-year-old prodigy named Abby via Facebook. Over the course of nine months, the two exchange more than 1,500 messages, and Abby's family (mother, father, and sister) also become friends with Nev on Facebook. Throughout the documentary, Nev and his brother Ariel (who is also the documentarian) start noticing inconsistencies in various stories that are being told. Music that was allegedly created by Abby is found to be taken from YouTube. Ariel convinces Nev to continue the relationship knowing that there are inconsistencies and lies just to see how it will all play out. The success of Catfish spawned a television show by the same name on MTV.

From this one story, we can easily see the problems that can arise from anonymity on the Internet. Often behavior that would be deemed completely inappropriate in a face to face encounter suddenly becomes appropriate because it's deemed "less real" by some. One of the major problems with online anonymity has been *cyberbullying*. People today can post horrible things about one another online without any worry that the messages will be linked back to them directly. Unlike face to face bullying victims who leave the bullying behind when they leave school, teens facing cyberbullying cannot even find peace at home because the Internet follows them everywhere. In 2013 12-year-old Rebecca Ann Sedwick committed suicide after being the perpetual victim of cyberbullying through social media apps on her phone. Rebecca suffered a barrage of bullying for over a year and by around 15 different girls in her school. Sadly, Rebecca's tale is one that is all too familiar in today's world. Nine percent of middle-school students reported being victims of cyberbullying, and there is a relationship between victimization and suicidal ideation.

It's also important to understand that cyberbullying isn't just a phenomenon that happens with children. A 2009 survey of Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union members, found that 34% of respondents faced FtF bullying, and 10.7% faced cyberbullying. All of the individuals who were targets of cyberbullying were also bullied FtF.[51]

Many people prefer anonymity when interacting with others online, and there can be legitimate reasons to engage in online interactions with others. For example, when one of our authors was coming out as LGBTQIA+, our coauthor regularly talked with people online as they melded the new LGBTQIA+ identity with their Southern and Christian identities. Having the ability to talk anonymously with others allowed our coauthor to gradually come out by forming anonymous relationships with others dealing with the same issues.

Pseudonymous Identity

The second category of interaction is pseudonymous. Wood and Smith used the term pseudonymous because of the prefix "pseudonym": "Pseudonym comes from the Latin words for 'false' and 'name,' and it provides an audience with the ability to attribute statements and actions to a common source [emphasis in original]."[52] Whereas an anonym allows someone to be completely anonymous, a pseudonym "allows one to contribute to the fashioning of one's own image."[53] Using pseudonyms is hardly something new. Famed mystery author Agatha Christi wrote over

66 detective novels, but still published six romance novels using the pseudonym Mary Westmacott. Bestselling science fiction author Michael Crichton (of Jurassic Park fame), wrote under three different pseudonyms (John Lange, Jeffery Hudson, and Michael Douglas) when he was in medical school.

Even J. K. Rowling (of Harry Potter fame) used the pseudonym Robert Galbraith to write her follow-up novel to the series, The Cuckoo's Calling (2013). Rowling didn't want the media hype or inflated reader expectations while writing her follow-up novel. Unfortunately for Rowling, the secret didn't stay hidden very long.

The veneer of the Internet allows us to determine how much of an identity we wish to front in online presentations. These images can range from a vague silhouette to a detailed snapshot. Whatever the degree of identity presented, however, it appears that control and empowerment are benefits for users of these communication technologies."[54]

Some people even adopt a pseudonym because their online actions may not be "on-brand" for their day-job or because they don't want to be fully exposed online.

Real Life Identity

Lastly, some people have their real-life identities displayed online. You can find people on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.… Some realize that this behavior is a part of their professional persona, so they don't put anything on one of these sites they wouldn't want other professionals to see and read. When it comes to people in the public eye, most of them use some variation of their real names to enhance their brands. That's not to say that many of these same people don't have multiple online accounts, some of which may be completely anonymous or even pseudonymous.

Nonverbal Cues

One issue related to CMC is nonverbal communication. Historically, most of the media people have used to interact with one another have been asynchronous and text-based, making it difficult to fully ascertain the meaning behind a string of words. Mary J. Culnan and M. Lynne Markus believe that the functions nonverbal behaviors meet in interpersonal interactions simply go unmet in CMC (1987). If so, interpersonal communication must always be inherently impersonal when it's conducted using computer-mediated technologies. This perspective has three underlying assumptions:

1. Communication mediated by technology filters out communicative cues found in face to face interaction,
2. Different media filter out or transmit different cues, and
3. Substituting technology-mediated for face to face communication will result in predictable changes in intrapersonal and interpersonal variables.

First, CMC interactions "filter out" communicative cues found in face to face interactions. For example, if you're on the telephone with someone, you can't make eye contact or see their gestures, facial expressions, etc.… If you're reading an email, you have no nonverbal information to help you interpret the message because there is none. In these examples, the nonverbal cues have been "filtered out" by the media being used.

Unfortunately, even if we don't have the nonverbals to help us interpret a message, we interpret the message using our perception of how the sender intended us to understand this message, which is often wrong. How many times have you seen an incorrectly read text or email start a conflict? Of course, one of the first attempts to recover some sense of nonverbal meaning was the emoticon that we discussed earlier in this chapter.

One early realization about email and message boards was that people relied solely on text to interpret messages, which lacked nonverbal cues to aid in interpretation. On September 19, 1982, Scott Fahlman, a research professor of computer science at Carnegie Mellon, came up with an idea. You see, at Carnegie Mellon in the early 1980s (like most research universities at the time), they had their own bulletin board system (BBS), which discussed everything from campus politics to science fiction. As Fahlman noted,

"Given the nature of the community, a good many of the posts were humorous, or at least attempted humor." But "The problem was that if someone made a sarcastic remark, a few readers would fail to get the joke and each of them would post a lengthy diatribe in response."[4]

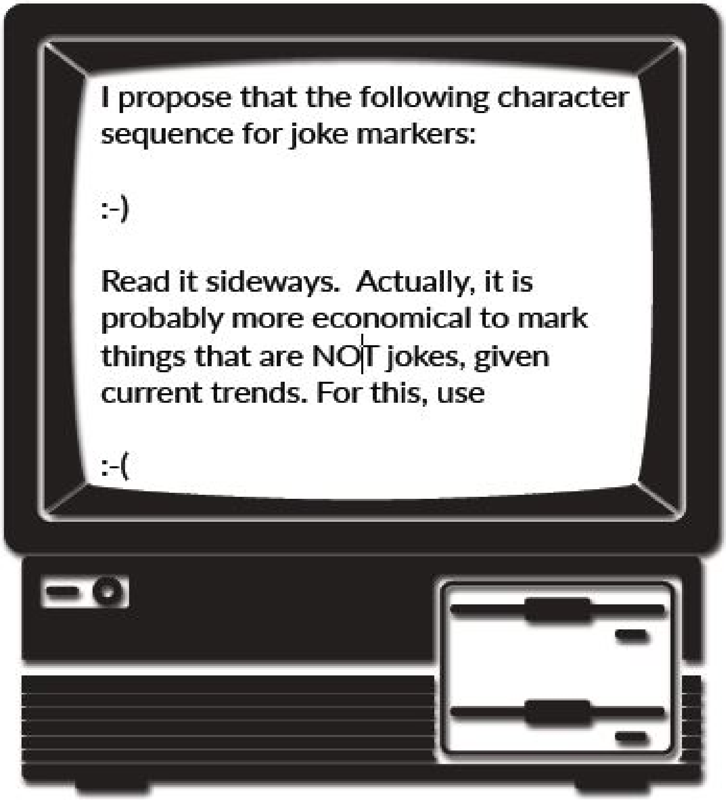

Figure 12.3 Emoticon Email

After giving some thought to the problem, he posted the message seen in Figure 12.3. Thus, the emoticon (emotion icon) was born. An emoticon is a series of characters that are designed to help readers interpret a writer's intended tone or the feelings the writer intended to convey. Over the years, many different emoticons were created like the smiley and sad faces, lol (laughing out loud), ROFL (rolling on the floor laughing), :-O (surprise), :-* (kiss), ? (sticking your tongue out), :-/ (quizzical), :-X (sealed lips), 0:-) (angel), *\0/* (cheerleader), and so many others. As we've discussed previously in this text, so much of how we understand each other is based on our nonverbal behaviors, so these emoticons were an attempt to bring a lost part of the human communicative experience to a text-based communicative experience. These emoticons developed into emojis which have developed into apps like Bitmoji that allow for custom characters.

Key Takeaways

1. CMC has changed throughout the years to allow for more interaction and communication online.
2. Synchronous and asynchronous communication allows for different methods of communication.
3. Following netiquette rules can help us to be more effective with our online communication.
4. We use online platforms to create identifies for ourselves in the online environment.
5. Nonverbal cues are typically missing from online interactions.

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5.7 Social Media and Relationships

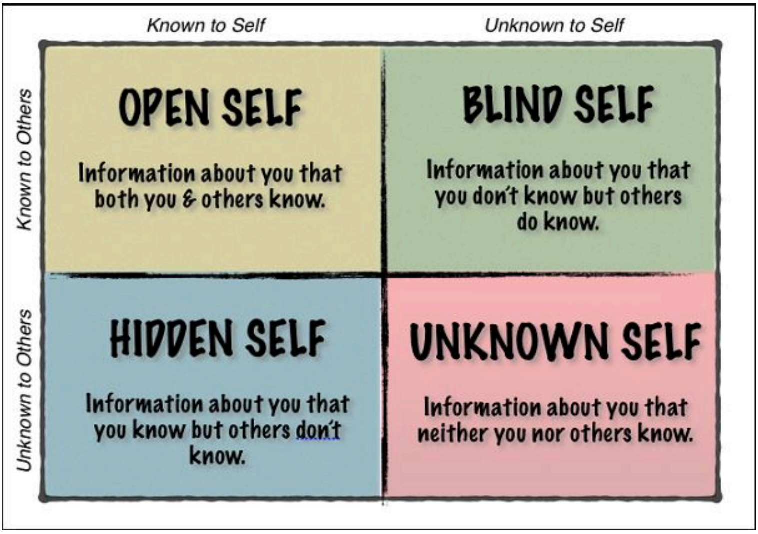
Learning Objectives

1. Explain self-disclosure in an online environment.
2. Use privacy settings to protect information.
3. Explain online dating advantages and disadvantages.

We spend much of our time on apps designed to connect us with others. We present an identity we want others to see using self-disclosure but there are dangers in sharing information in an online environment. Perceptions of the people we interact with online may not match the reality of who they are or who they are trying to make others believe they are. Even with so much uncertainty, dating app popularity has risen and many have met their "perfect" match online.

Online self-disclosure

Previously we discussed the Johari Window and how we use self-disclosure to choose how much of ourselves we reveal to others.



The Johari Window model is also referred to as a 'disclosure/ feedback model of self-awareness', and by some people an information processing tool. The Johari Window actually represents information – feelings, experience, views, attitudes, skills, intentions, motivation, etc – within or about a person – in relation to their group, from four perspectives, which are described below. The Johari Window model can also be used to represent the same information for a group in relation to other groups. Johari Window terminology refers to 'self' and 'others': 'self' means oneself, ie, the person subject to the Johari Window analysis. 'Others' means other people in the person's group or team. There are two key ideas behind the Johari Window.

1. That individuals can build trust with others by disclosing information about themselves.
2. That they can learn about themselves and come to terms with personal issues with the help of feedback from others.

In terms of social media, The Johari Window becomes an interesting theory to explore. When you edit your profile, you disclose information about yourself to others. Depending on how you have adjusted privacy settings, your entire profile (ie- your self-disclosure) can be viewed by anyone. To further complicate the issue, if you have not set your "wall" privacy to "friends only", anyone could read your status updates as well. So, what should be a reciprocal exchange, has become a one sided exchange. The idea that someone you don't even know could be reading your profile and wall means that you have self disclosed "your private" self and possibly your "hidden self" unbeknown to yourself. To protect the exchange of information you are sharing with this new culture, you should explore the privacy settings on your Facebook page.

General Privacy Settings for Social Media Users

Be wary of what you post on your social media accounts and be sure to review the privacy settings to meet your needs.

1. Use Your Friend Lists

You can create Friend Lists for all of your organizational needs, allowing you to quickly view friends by type and send messages to your lists. There are a few very important things to remember about friend lists:

- You can add each friend to more than one friend group
- Friend groups should be used like "tags" as used elsewhere around the web
- Friend Lists can have specific privacy policies applied to them

2. Remove Yourself from Search Results

As a professional, you may not want people you work with to see personal information. There are numerous reasons that individuals don't want their information to show up in search results on social media, and it's simple to turn off your public visibility via settings.

3. Remove Yourself from Google

Typical information displayed in a search profile is limited to your profile picture, a list of your friends, a link to add you as a friend, and a link to send you a message. By visiting the privacy settings page listed in some social media apps settings, you can control the visibility of your public search listing which is visible to Google and other search engines.

4. Avoid the Infamous Photo/Video Tag Mistake

This is the classic social media problem. You let loose for a few hours one night (or day) and photos (or videos) of the moment are suddenly posted for all to view, not just your close friends who shared the moment with you. The result can be devastating. Some people have been fired from work after incriminating photos/videos were posted for the boss to see. For others, randomly tagged photos/videos have ended relationships.

5. Protect Against Published Application Stories

Frequently when you add an application, a news feed item is immediately published to your profile. That's why it's important to monitor what takes place after you install an application on social media platforms. Once you install an application you should visit your profile to ensure that no notification has been posted to your profile.

More often than not, nothing will be posted, but there are many applications on the platform unfortunately that publish stories without you knowing it. There are two ways to avoid having this happen: don't visit applications or scan your profile every time that you do. Ultimately you shouldn't be concerned about applications that you've built a trusted relationship with but any new applications could potentially post embarrassing notifications.

6. Make Your Contact Information Private

For each contact item that you have in your profile, you should set custom privacy settings so that contacts that you aren't close to don't have access to your phone number and/or email. It's a small change but it can save you the hassle of being pestered by people you don't know well. Also, protecting your privacy is generally a good practice to get in the habit of doing.

HOW SOCIAL MEDIA LEADS TO SELF-OBSESSION

Student Content

My 500-Word Story on My Unique Perspective on Social Media

An audio element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can listen to it online here: https://open.maricopa.edu/com110/?p=656

Music: Spirit (Final) by Aritus, CC BY 3.0.

Social media has always had a big impact on my life. Around the age of 11 I was invested in playing the games on Facebook. My mom got to the point where she was so tired of having to log into her Facebook for me to play the games that she allowed me to make my own social media page. This is what started the slope of my life into the social media world. My knowledge on social media is extensive. When I was entering high school Instagram had just become a very popular platform, and having started social media at 11, by 15 I had almost every social media there was. Though this was the age I became invested into making a good instagram. I followed bloggers, who posted their luxurious lives, and I strived to have mine resemble theirs.

This is when I began to develop a knowledge on editing photos. I downloaded an app called FaceTune where I learned the interworking's of photo editing. I eventually got so good I could completely change the background of the photo and edit out anyone's insecurities, even items in pictures. I also became invested in the Adobe editing world with an app called Lightroom. The Famous Influencers on Instagram I followed, were selling edit's to photos that made your feed look a certain way. I was so obsessed with the concept of a color scheme, and all my photo's looking the same on social media, that the photo's I posted didn't even resemble me.

My whole social media, which I had become a pro at creating a whole life in, was a complete sham. I had become so good a using social media, that I wasn't being my self. I had looked more at how many followers I had gained then the positive things I was doing in life. Social Media can consume a person, once you gain even the slightest bit of knowledge. That is what happened to me. Even before going to college, I had become obsessed with how my outfits looked, how many people commented, and how many likes I got on every photo. I would use my Instagram algorithm to see who was interacting, what the best times to post were, and what type of posts got the most likes. This lead to me having 'photo shoots' to get just the right picture, because I had to look perfect on Instagram.

My obsession with Instagram, is what lead me to being insecure about my body and the way I looked. I eventually had to take a step back and see that my knowledge and exposure to social media is what was consuming me. I needed to stop letting my world be revolved around getting a perfect picture, because I wouldn't enjoy and experience since I was too focused on taking pictures. I really wish that I hadn't had the exposure to social media that I did because I think I would have been a lot happier with my life if it weren't for social media's effect. I hope as I grow older I can start living in the moment and using less social media.

About the Author

Savannah Williams is a Communication Major at the University of Arizona. She is from Scottsdale, Arizona. Williams one day wants to open up her own business in her hometown.

Online Dating

A significant part of human social life is organized around who we form lasting romantic relationships with. The online world, once idealized as a place of anonymity and separation from offline life, now has networks devoted to replicating offline life online, and building networks of relationships. These interconnected relationships are what experts really mean when we talk about *social networks*, which sociologists began studying decades before online social networking sites existed.

DATING ON SOCIAL MEDIA: AUTHENTICITY VS. STRUCTURE

Student Content, Fall 2020

Boyfriends and Social Media

An audio element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can listen to it online here: https://open.maricopa.edu/com110/?p=656

What Social Media Means to Me

For me social media has always been a safe space for me to be my authentic self. Starting it in the 5th grade, I had no intent to show off or impress anyone. I would post maybe five times a day and I wouldn't even care what I posted about. However, I noticed recently that I have started to fold into the mix of overthinking instagram and thinking too much about the traditions within it.

Instagram is so big that it has its own culture, its own language, its own traditions. And as users we have the option to adhere to these or follow our own path. The societal pressure, and especially being 19, it's hard to not just follow the status quo. I have tried to go down my own path of not caring what other people think about my profile, but over time it has gotten harder to not just post for me. You find yourself wanting to post to impress your mom, friends, and other acquaintances.

In my podcast I discuss with my boyfriend Alec, the peer pressure I felt of us posting about each other for the first time. As a guy, who despite his resistance, follows his own set of traditions on social media. We relayed how as a culture we perform or act on our posts. As a little girl the biggest deal to me was to be able to post pictures of my boyfriend as I got older because that's what I saw my older cousins do and what I was looking forward to be able to do. When Alec and I were able to visit each other during the summer, I knew that we had to get the perfect photo for instagram. And for the most part there were great moments of just us living in the moment, which I really tried to stick with, but then I remembered the pressure I felt. This pressure stems from years of social anxiety and having my ow insecurities.

Talking with Alec made me realize how much power I give social media, and I think that goes with a lot of other people. We are given these standards or traditions and told to stick with them, and if we don't we will be criticized. And I think that nowadays there is too much power that social media gets, power I no longer want to give. I mean, instead of enjoying time in front of the golden gate bridge with my boyfriend, I made us put up a facade that we were having a perfect time. And as much as it was great, it wasn't perfect, because nothing is!

Overall, what I learned from this experience and being able to state it out loud was that I no longer want social media to have power over me. I want to be able to have freedom and express whatever I want. Whether that's a political opinion, an outfit I would have otherwise not shown, or really goofy photos that I would have normally been too embarrassed to share. For the sake of my mental health and overall enjoyment of the app, I want to let social media be fun and not always have to follow the typical traditions that come with it.

About the Author 

Alyssa De Leon is a current sophomore at the University of Arizona. She is a film and television major from northern California. She spends quarantine watching reality tv and baking.

A cellular phone number in one study represented a new layer of intimacy. Does it still?

In a 2014 article entitled From Facebook to Cell Calls, Yang and coauthors found that college students progressed through layers of electronic intimacy – different media chosen as benchmarks in the progression of a romantic relationship. When they were interested in someone, they began by connecting with a "crush" through Facebook, which allowed the "crush" to see who their admirer's friends were and how the admirer looked, communicated, and behaved. The next layer was instant messaging – direct communication, but not as direct as the use of one's "digits" or cellular connection. After instant messaging, they moved to the more intimate sanctum of text messaging. The final step was a face-to-face meeting. Overall this sequence of media they used followed a pattern: they began by performing in front of and viewing one another's social networks, they then moved into more direct one-on-one communication before meeting in person.

Data in the above study was likely collected in 2011 or 2012. So what might people like the participants in Yang and coauthors' study be doing to find romance now, five years later? College students today may be using some different platforms in their pursuit of new connections than the students in Yang et al's study; Instagram is likely high on the list.

However, it is also likely that at least some of the pursuit of romantic interests that happened through different media in the past is now consolidating in online dating sites. The Pew Research Center published a report in 2016 about the growing number of Americans who have used online dating. They found that online dating usage by those aged 18-24 has nearly tripled since 2013 and usage by those aged 55-64 has doubled; other age groups' use has increased as well.

Online dating apps afford the presentation of ourselves to prospective friends, partners, mates, and hookups. On these apps, users' imagery and self-description tend to be idealized, sometimes to the point of deception. Apps such as settleforlove.com have been developed around the desire for more honesty in online dating, but their market share has not been spectacular. It seems upfront honesty is not the best way to gather a public of potential lovers.

Do dating apps also follow the sequence found in Yang and coauthors' study, moving from social and tribal to direct connection? That depends. Some apps leave out learning about someone's social connections, relying instead on complex algorithms to calculate who might be a good match – even if scientific evidence does not show that these algorithms work. Others just speed through the sequence by facilitating immediate direct connection, and in some cases, quick sex. Some use the language of sociality like "tribe" and some connect you to matches through your social networks.

But we humans and our cultural norms still determine a great deal of how dating apps are used. Just as bias affects algorithms across the web, bias has been found to tip the scales on dating sites in favor of white men, to the detriment of groups including black women and Asian men. Sites and apps follow our leads as much as we follow theirs. And apps only go so far; dating apps today function more like online shopping than like relationship formation of the past. In the BBC Horizon film How to Find Love Online, the romance-focused anthropologist Dr. Helen Fisher says they are better called "Introduction services," with the act of dating and the final vetting before it still conducted in person.

Mobile Dating Apps

Mobile apps are particularly influential in the world of online dating today. One of the pioneers was Grindr, a gay dating app. Bae, an up and coming site branded "for black singles," was recently acquired by a company aiming to make it global. Her caters to queer women.

And then there is Tinder, the most popular in the US (although not the world) at the time of this writing, which has taken the heterosexual dating world by storm. There are many critiques of Tinder's effect on heterosexual dating, however, including studies finding that it favors men's usage norms over women's. Tinder faces strong competition from numerous competitors for the US market, however, including a direct challenge – with a grudge – from a Tinder cofounder's site, Bumble, discussed more below.

CONNECTING, TINDER, AND THE SOCIAL MEDIA COMA

Student Content

My Perspective on Social Media Use

An audio element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can listen to it online here: https://open.maricopa.edu/com110/?p=656

Living in this day and age, social media is used by millions and millions of people all around the globe. I enjoy using social media for purposes such as being social (obviously), keeping in touch with my friends and family, expressing myself, sharing some of my own personal thoughts, beliefs, and opinions, and having a platform for myself to share whatever I want, whenever I want.

Social media usage comes with many benefits and positives. However, there are also many negatives that come along with being on social media. In my own personal experience, I have gotten my feelings hurt over seeing people doing something without inviting me, leaving me to feel left out and excluded. Also, people tend to be very harsh and rude over social media because they are behind a screen and not face to face. Therefore, they may be more confident in the cruel words that they are typing. I try to use my social media as a positive additive into my life. I feel like there is already so much hate, judgement, and negativity in the world, so why should there be any more from being on social media (which is supposed to be fun)? Personally, I choose to follow accounts that preach positivity and lift my spirit, and then unfollow all the others that do the opposite.

Social media can also be very time consuming. Some days I have found myself buried in my phone on the couch or laying in bed for hours upon hours as the day wasted away. I like to call this action a "**social media coma**." It is moments like those that make me feel guilty and ashamed that I actually spent countless hours on my phone, examining other people's lives, when I am actually wasting my own by doing so.

Another aspect of social media that I do not participate in, unlike many high school students, college students, and young adults is online dating/ hooking up apps. The most popular one among this generation is Tinder. Tinder is a "dating" app where you basically judge someone in a matter of a few seconds on their looks, age, name, location, and biography (if they have one). Then, you either swipe right or left, depending on if you like what you see or not. If you match with someone, meaning both people swipe right on each other, then you can arrange plans to start talking, hanging out, or whatever else. I have an old soul and would much rather find a life partner in a more natural way… say maybe bumping into someone at the grocery store and locking eyes and feeling immediate sparks (very cliche and seen in almost every rom-com, I know)! I don't think that there is anything wrong or shameful about Tinder or other dating apps, but I just choose to not be a part of them.

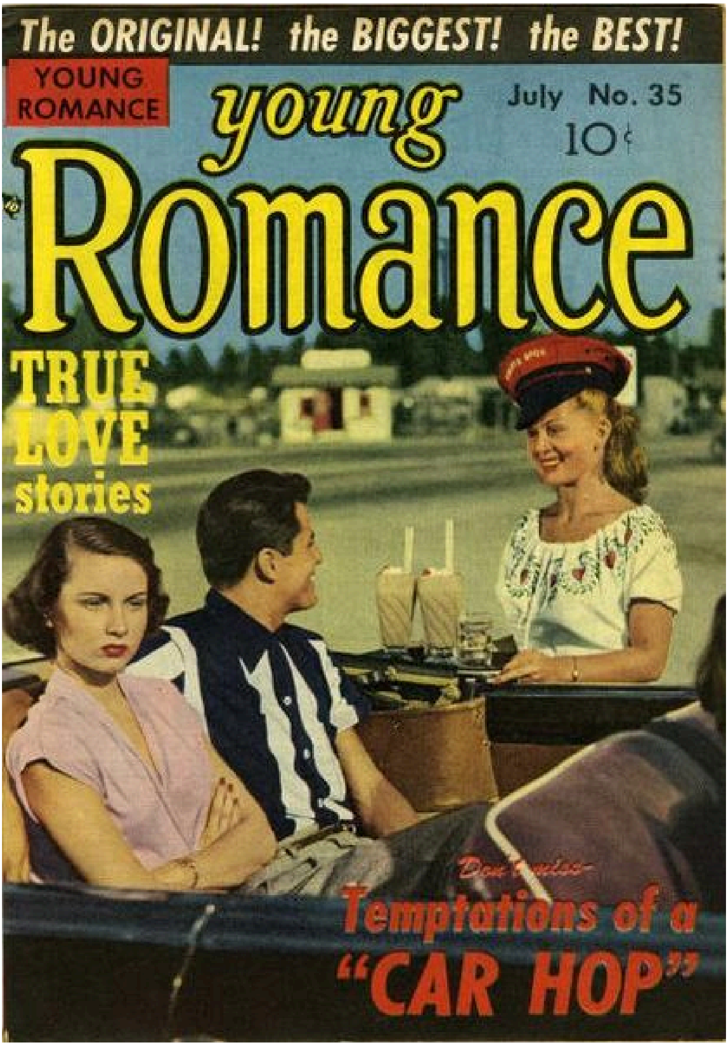
Overall, social media is very prevalent in today's society. It can provide countless opportunities and knowledge, just at the click of your fingers. I think that using social media in moderation is a good thing to do. People should also be uplifting, supportive, and kind to one another over the screen to help make social media a healthier, happier, and safer environment.

About the author

Marissa Farhi is a college student at the University of Arizona. She loves to work out, spend time with friends and family, and eat avocado toast.

The Paradox of Choice

Some scientists and users are critical of online dating apps because of the wide selection they provide. As Aziz Ansari points out in this podcast episode, and in this article, for some people dating once meant choosing from an extremely small selection of people. He and the podcast host cite studies finding a paradox of choice, psychologist Barry Schwartz's theory that the more selection we have, the less likely we are to choose something and feel satisfied with our choice – whether it is a partner or a jar of jam. And today? Thanks to these apps, users get exposed to a lot more jam.



Young Romance: Many have blamed Tinder for a terrible modern dating culture that leaves young women dissatisfied.

Many in the article linked above, including Sales, have charged that

Tinder encourages a culture of harassment of women. That may be in part because the culture within the company has been the site of harassment. Tinder co-founder Whitney Wolfe left Tinder in 2014 after being sexually harassed there, received a settlement, and started Bumble.For users in big cities, it is possible to swipe almost infinitely through prospects for dating and potential sex. As my friend Mary Franklin Harvin describes it, it gives "an air of disposability" to people. Nancy Jo Sales' Vanity Fair article on Tinder goes further, claiming women have fewer orgasms in the numbers-game exchanges Tinder facilitates – and in these situations with so little intimacy or rapport for feedback, men do not learn the skills to be good lovers.

But online dating sites, like most technologies, depend on humans to use them and shape their norms. To end with a ray of hope for those who feel they have to use Tinder, artists like Audrey Jones, Matt Starr, and Jarrod Allen use Tinder to make art. If nothing else, they remind us that humans can choose to use platforms in new ways – even if using them differently than the crowd can be lonely.

Key Takeaways

1. We use self-disclosure as we post information about ourselves online to create identities we want to share with others.
2. We should be mindful of the ways we can protect our online information from those we don't wish to share it with.
3. Online dating has offers opportunities for us to meet others but also comes with many challenges.

PART VI

CHAPTER 6: INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS

In our sender-oriented society, listening is often overlooked as an important part of the communication process. Yet research shows that adults spend about 45 percent of their time listening, which is more than any other communicative activity. In some contexts, we spend even more time listening than that. On average, workers spend 55 percent of their workday listening, and managers spend about 63 percent of their day listening.Owen Hargie, *Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2011), 177.

Listening is a primary means through which we learn new information, which can help us meet instrumental needs as we learn things that helps us complete certain tasks at work or school and get things done in general. The act of listening to our relational partners provides support, which is an important part of relational maintenance and helps us meet our relational needs. Listening to what others say about us helps us develop an accurate self-concept, which can help us more strategically communicate for identity needs in order to project to others our desired self. Overall, improving our listening skills can help us be better students, better relational partners, and more successful professionals.

6.1 Emotions and Communication

Emotions and Feelings

Learning Objectives

1. Explain interrelationships among emotions and feelings
2. Explain functions of emotions
3. Describe emotional awareness and its importance to interpersonal communication.
4. Differentiate between "I" and "You" statements.
5. Explain the concept of emotional intelligence.
6. Describe fallacies leading to debilitating emotions.

Being emotional is an inherent part of being a human. However, the way we communicate about emotion can make emotion seem negative. Have you ever said, "Don't feel that way" or "I shouldn't feel this way"? When we negate our own or someone else's emotions, we are negating ourselves or that person and dismissing the right to emotional responses. At the same time, though, no one else can make you "feel" a specific way. Our emotions are our emotions. They are how we interpret and cope with life. A person may set up a context where you experience an emotion, but you are the one who is still experiencing that emotion and allowing yourself to experience that emotion. If you don't like "feeling" a specific way, then you can change it. We all have the ability to alter our emotions. Altering our emotional states (in a proactive way) is how we get through life. Maybe you just broke up with someone, and listening to music helps you work through the grief you are experiencing to get to a better place. For others, they need to openly communicate about how they are feeling in an effort to process and work through emotions.

Attempting to deny that the emotion exists is not an effective way to process emotions. Think of this like a balloon. With each breath of air you blow into the balloon, you are bottling up more and more emotions. Eventually, that balloon will get to a point where it cannot handle any more air in it before it explodes. Humans can be the same way with emotions when we bottle them up inside. The final breath of air in our emotional balloon doesn't have to be big or intense. However, it can still cause tremendous emotional outpouring that is often very damaging to the person and their interpersonal relationships with others. Other research has demonstrated that handling negative emotions during conflicts within a marriage (especially on the part of the wife) can lead to faster de-escalations of conflicts and faster conflict mediation between spouses (Bloch, Haase, & Levenson, 2014).

Understanding Emotions

Emotion versus Feeling

To start our examination of the idea of emotions and feelings and how they relate to harmony and discord in a relationship, it's important to differentiate between emotions and feelings. *Emotions* are our physical reactions to stimuli in the outside environment.

They can be objectively measured by blood flow, brain activity, and nonverbal reactions to things because they are activated through neurotransmitters and hormones released by the brain. *Feelings* are the conscious experience of emotional reactions. They are our responses to thoughts and interpretations given to emotions based on experiences, memory, expectations, and personality. So, there is an inherent relationship between emotions and feelings, but they are different.

Intrapersonal Functions of Emotions

Emotions are rapid information-processing systems that help us act with minimal thinking (Tooby & Cosmides, 2008). Problems associated with birth, battle, death, and seduction have occurred throughout evolutionary history and emotions evolved to aid humans in adapting to those problems rapidly and with minimal conscious cognitive effort. If we did not have emotions, we could not make rapid decisions concerning whether to attack, defend, flee, care for others, reject food, or approach something useful, all of which were functionally adaptive in our evolutionary history and helped us to survive. For instance, drinking spoiled milk or eating rotten eggs has negative consequences for our welfare. The emotion of disgust, however, helps us immediately take action by not ingesting them in the first place or by vomiting them out. This response is adaptive because it aids, ultimately, in our survival and allows us to act immediately without much thinking. In some instances, taking the time to sit and rationally think about what to do, calculating cost-benefit ratios in one's mind, is a luxury that might cost one's life. Emotions evolved so that we can act without that depth of thinking.

Emotions Prepare the Body for Immediate Action

Emotions prepare us for behavior. When triggered, emotions orchestrate systems such as perception, attention, inference, learning, memory, goal choice, motivational priorities, physiological reactions, motor behaviors, and behavioral decision making (Cosmides & Tooby, 2000; Cosmides & Tooby, 2008). Emotions simultaneously activate certain systems and deactivate others in order to prevent the chaos of competing systems operating at the same time, allowing for coordinated responses to environmental stimuli (Levenson, 1999). For instance, when we are afraid, our bodies shut down temporarily unneeded digestive processes, resulting in saliva reduction (a dry mouth); blood flows disproportionately to the lower half of the body; the visual field expands; and air is breathed in, all preparing the body to flee. Emotions initiate a system of components that includes subjective experience, expressive behaviors, physiological reactions, action tendencies, and cognition, all for the purposes of specific actions; the term "emotion" is, in reality, a metaphor for these reactions.

One common misunderstanding many people have when thinking about emotions, however, is the belief that emotions must always directly produce action. This is not true. Emotion certainly *prepares* the body for action; but whether people actually engage in action is dependent on many factors, such as the context within which the emotion has occurred, the target of the emotion, the perceived consequences of one's actions, previous experiences, and so forth (Baumeister, Vohs, DeWall, & Zang, 2007; Matsumoto & Wilson, 2008). Thus, emotions are just one of many determinants of behavior, albeit an important one.

Emotions Influence Thoughts

Emotions are also connected to thoughts and memories. Memories are not just facts that are encoded in our brains; they are colored with the emotions felt at those times the facts occurred (Wang & Ross, 2007). Thus, emotions serve as the neural glue that connects those disparate facts in our minds. That is why it is easier to remember happy thoughts when happy, and angry times when angry. Emotions serve as the affective basis of many attitudes, values, and beliefs that we have about the world and the people around us; without emotions those attitudes, values, and beliefs would be just statements without meaning, and emotions give those statements meaning. Emotions influence our thinking processes, sometimes in constructive ways, sometimes not. It is difficult to think critically and clearly when we feel intense emotions, but easier when we are not overwhelmed with emotions (Matsumoto, Hirayama, & LeRoux, 2006).

Emotions Motivate Future Behaviors

Because emotions prepare our bodies for immediate action, influence thoughts, and can be felt, they are important motivators of future behavior. Many of us strive to experience the feelings of satisfaction, joy, pride, or triumph in our accomplishments and achievements. At the same time, we also work very hard to avoid strong "negative" feelings; for example, once we have felt the emotion of disgust when drinking the spoiled milk, we generally work very hard to avoid having those feelings again (e.g., checking the expiration date on the label before buying the milk, smelling the milk before drinking it, watching if the milk curdles in one's coffee before drinking it). Emotions, therefore, not only influence immediate actions but also serve as an important motivational basis for future behaviors.

Interpersonal Functions of Emotions

Emotions are expressed both verbally through words and nonverbally through facial expressions, voices, gestures, body postures, and movements. We are constantly expressing emotions when interacting with others, and others can reliably judge those emotional expressions (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002; Matsumoto, 2001) thus, emotions have signal value to others and influence others and our social interactions. Emotions and their expressions communicate information to others about our feelings, intentions, relationship with the target of the emotions, and the environment. Because emotions have this communicative signal value, they help solve social problems by evoking responses from others, by signaling the nature of interpersonal relationships, and by providing incentives for desired social behavior (Keltner, 2003).

Emotional expressions provide information about the nature of the relationships among interactants. Some of the most important and provocative set of findings in this area come from studies involving married couples (Gottman & Levenson, 1992; Gottman, Levenson, & Woodin, 2001). In this research, married couples visited a laboratory after having not seen each other for 24 hours, and then engaged in intimate conversations about daily events or issues of conflict. Discrete expressions of contempt, especially by the men, and disgust, especially by the women, predicted later marital dissatisfaction and even divorce.

Emotional Expressions Facilitate Specific Behaviors in Perceivers

Because facial expressions of emotion are universal social signals, they contain meaning not only about the expressor's psychological state but also about that person's intent and subsequent behavior. This information affects what the perceiver is likely to do. People observing fearful faces, for instance, are more likely to produce approach-related behaviors, whereas people who observe angry faces are more likely to produce avoidance-related behaviors (Marsh, Ambady, & Kleck, 2005). Even subliminal presentation of smiles produces increases in how much beverage people pour and consume and how much they are willing to pay for it; presentation of angry faces decreases these behaviors (Winkielman, Berridge, & Wilbarger, 2005). Also, emotional displays evoke specific, complementary emotional responses from observers; for example, anger evokes fear in others (Dimberg & Ohman, 1996; Esteves, Dimberg, & Ohman, 1994), whereas distress evokes sympathy and aid (Eisenberg, Fabes, Miller, Fultz, Shell, Mathy, & Reno, 1989).

Communicating Emotions

Emotional Awareness

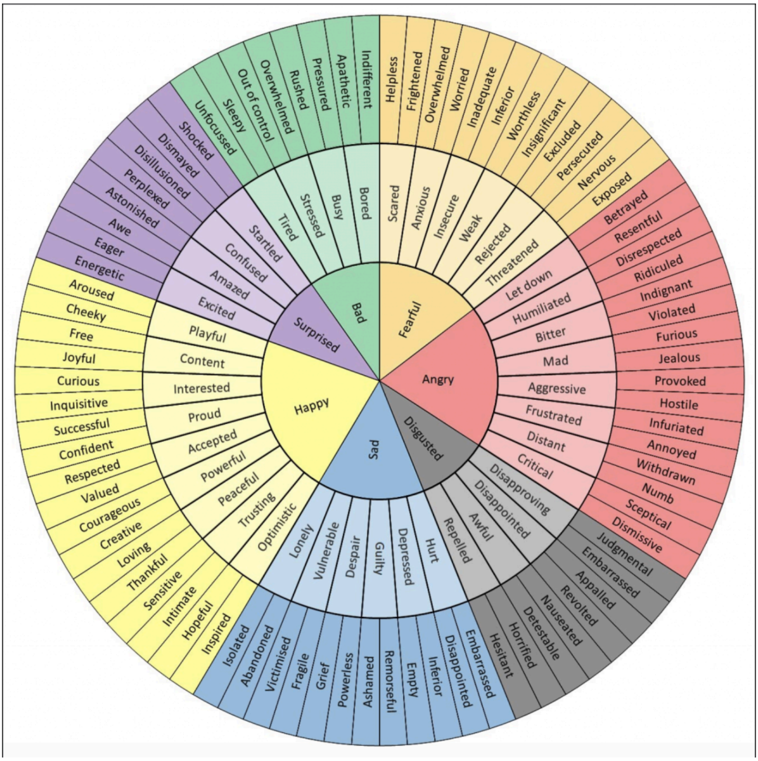
Sadly, many people are unaware of their own emotions. Emotional awareness, or an individual's ability to clearly express, in words, what they are feeling and why, is an extremely important factor in effective interpersonal communication. Unfortunately, our emotional vocabulary is often quite limited. One extreme version of not having an emotional vocabulary is called alexithymia, "a general deficit in emotional vocabulary—the ability to identify emotional feelings, differentiate emotional states from physical sensations, communicate feelings to others, and process emotion in a meaningful way" (Friedman, et al., 2003). Furthermore, there are many people who can accurately differentiate emotional states but lack the actual vocabulary for a wide range of different emotions. For some people, their emotional vocabulary may consist of good, bad, angry, and fine.

First, it's important to distinguish between our emotional states and how we interpret an emotional state. For example, you can feel sad or depressed because those are feelings. However, you cannot feel alienated because this is not a feeling. Your sadness and depression may lead you to perceive yourself as alienated, but alienation is a perception of one's self and not an actual emotional state. There are several evaluative terms that people ascribe themselves (usually in the process of blaming others for their feelings) that they label emotions, but which are in actuality evaluations and not emotions. Table 9.2 presents a list of common evaluative words that people confuse for emotional states. Instead, avoiding these evaluative words will result in more effective communication.

Table 9.2 Evaluative Words Confused for Emotions

Abandoned	Cornered	Mistreated	Scorned
Abused	Devalued	Misunderstood	Taken for granted
Affronted	Diminished	Neglected	Threatened
Alienated	Distrusted	Overworked	Thwarted
Attacked	Humiliated	Patronized	Tortured
Belittled	Injured	Pressured	Unappreciated
Betrayed	Interrupted	Provoked	Unheard
Boxed-in	Intimidated	Put away	Unseen
Bullied	Let down	Putdown	Unsupported
Cheated	Maligned	Rejected	Unwanted
Coerced	Manipulated	Ridiculed	Used
Co-opted	Mocked	Ruined	Wounded

Instead, using actual emotional words will communicate your feelings effectively. For most of us, we have a *very* limited emotional vocabulary. Think about it, how many emotion words can you even list? And more importantly, how many emotional experiences can you appropriately label? One of the best ways to improve your ability to be assertive is to improve your emotional vocabulary. A great tool for this is a Feelings Wheel.



As you can see, there are a *lot* of words to describe our emotional vocabulary. One of the worlds leading experts in emotions is Susan David (2016) and her research in the book Emotional Agility tells us that we need to have an emotional vocabulary of at least 30 words in order to accurately experience, express, and ultimately work through our emotions.

More from Susan David in this wonderful TedTalk.

https://youtube.com/watch?v=NDQ1Mi5I4rg%3Ffeature%3Doembed%26rel%3D0

“You” Statements

“You are mean.”

“You make me feel unloved.”

“You don’t care about me.”

According to Marshall Rosenberg (2003), the father of nonviolent communication, “You” statements ultimately are moralistic judgments where we imply the wrongness or badness of another person and the way they have behaved. When we make moralistic judgments about others, we tend to deny responsibility for our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Remember, when it comes to feelings, no one can “make” you feel a specific way. We choose the feelings we inhabit; we do not inhabit the feelings that choose us. When we make moralistic judgments and deny responsibility, we end up in a constant cycle of defensiveness where our individual needs are not going to be met by our relational partners. Behind every negative emotion is a need not being fulfilled, and when we start blaming others, those needs will keep getting unfilled in the process. Often this lack of need fulfillment will result in us demanding someone fulfill our need or face blame or punishment. In highly volatile relationships, this constant blame cycle can become very detrimental, and no one’s needs are getting met.

Instead, when we state observed behaviors and how they make us feel, we are directly and effectively communicating our actual feelings. For instance, “I felt angry when I came home and the dishes were in the sink.” However, just observing behavior and stating how you feel only gets you part of the way there because you’re still not describing your need. Now, when we talk about the idea of “needing” something, we are not talking about this strictly in terms of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, though those are all entirely appropriate needs. At the same time, relational needs are generally not rewards like tangible items or money. Instead, Marshall Rosenberg categorizes basic needs that we all have falling into the categories: autonomy, celebration, play, physical nurturance, integrity, and interdependence (Table 9.5). As you can imagine, any time these needs are not being met, you will want to get them fulfilled. As such, when we communicate about our feelings, tying them to an unmet or fulfilled need can have a positive effect. For example, you could say, “I feel dejected when you yell at me because I need to be respected.” In this sentence, you are identifying your need, observing the behavior, and labeling the need. Notice that there isn’t judgment associated with identifying one’s needs.

Table 9.5 Needs
Source: Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life 2nd Ed by Dr. Marshall B. Rosenberg, 2003–published by PuddleDancer Press and Used with Permission.
For more information visit www.CNVC.org and www.NonviolentCommunication.com

Autonomy	**Integrity**
· to choose one's dreams, goals, values	· authenticity
· to choose one's plan for fulfilling one's dreams, goals, values	· creativity
Celebration	· meaning
· to celebrate the creation of life and dreams fulfilled	· self-worth
· to celebrate losses: loved ones, dreams, etc. (mourning)	**Interdependence**
Play	· acceptance
· fun	· appreciation
· laughter	· closeness
Spiritual Communion	· community
· beauty	· consideration
· harmony	· contribution to the enrichment of life (to exercise one's power by giving that which contributes to life)
· inspiration	· emotional safety
· order	· empathy
· peace	· honesty (the empowering honest that enables us to learn from our limitations)
Physical Nurturance	· love
· air	· reassurance
· food, water	· respect
· movement, exercise	· support
· rest	· trust
· sexual expression	· understanding

· shelter	· warmth
· touch	

I statements

Furthermore, using “I” statements allows us to own our feelings and reactions and acknowledge ownership of them. Compare this to “you” messages, which negatively evaluate the other person’s behavior and places the blame on them. Consider the difference between “I feel worried when I don’t hear right back from you” vs. “You always ignore me!” Beware of starting off with an “I” statement and switching over to a “you” message, as this negates the purpose of using “I” language in the first place. For example, “I feel like you are neglecting me” is not really an “I” message expressing your own emotional reaction. It is, instead, a negative evaluation of another’s behavior. “You” statements such as “you make me feel…” places the blame for your feelings on the other and are likely to cause defensiveness. Instead, rephrase statements so that they convey your own feelings, as in “I feel lonely when we don’t hang out together” or “I feel anxious because decisions aren’t being made.” Often times, people do not mean to intentionally cause us to experience a negative emotion with their actions, so it is likely to be more effective if we take responsibility for how we are decoding and interpreting the actions of others.

Using the formula below, you can create an effective “I” statement.

Describe the emotion(s), what behavior caused the emotion(s), and the ‘why’ of the emotion(s):

- **The emotion(s):** Explicitly state the emotion(s) you are experiencing. The more specific we can be, the more likely the other will understand what we are feeling. Here, it is important to have a rich and nuanced emotional vocabulary to better understand and express these emotions to others as emotions can be mild, moderate, or intense. For example, consider the difference between the terms sad, melancholy, and despondent. Use the emotion wheel above to identify feelings.

- **The behavior:** Just as it is important to be able to describe the specific emotion, it is likewise important to describe the specific behavior(s) that triggered that emotion. For example, if our roommate leaves dirty dishes on the kitchen counter we may feel annoyed. When describing the behavior, we should state only what we've observed, objectively and specifically, and not in an evaluative or accusatory manner. "Leaving dirty dishes in the kitchen" is an appropriate way to describe behavior, whereas "acting like a jerk" is an evaluation of that behavior, and not very conducive to productive interactions. Instead, we could say "I feel annoyed when dirty dishes are left in the kitchen" versus "I feel annoyed when you act like a jerk." The latter statement also contains a "you" statement versus an "I" statement.
- **The why:** Finally, it's useful if we include a why in our "I" statement. Consider expressing a reason for why the behavior bothers us and leads to our particular emotional reaction? The why offers an explanation, interpretation, effect, or consequence of the behavior. One example might be "I feel annoyed when dirty dishes are left around the kitchen because it attracts cockroaches." When describing the why, attempt to avoid "you" language. For example, saying "I feel sad when our plans are broken because you are neglecting me" still inserts that problematic "you," which suggests blame and could lead to defensiveness. Instead, consider something like "I feel sad when our plans are broken because I want to spend more time together."

"You" can easily creep into all three parts of an "I" message, and can be tricky to avoid at first, so you may want to mentally rehearse or even write down what you plan to say. Also, it is a good idea to repeat the statement back to yourself and think about how you might respond if someone said the exact same thing to you in a similar situation. If it would cause you to react negatively or defensively, revise your statement.

You might find that, in some situations, avoiding "you" may not be productive. At times, it might be useful to share the thoughts we attach to another person's behavior. We can share our perspective by using a phrase such as "I took it to mean…" In this case, "you" might show up in your interpretation. However, you can reduce the potential for defensiveness by using language that reflects tentativeness and ownership. An example of this is "I'm confused about the dishes being left because it seems out of the norm for you, and I'm wondering if there's some sort of message in this." Another example might be "I get frustrated when the dishes are left on the counter because I remember talking about this before and I feel like I'm not being heard." We will learn more about language and actions that contribute to and reduce defensiveness in the next chapter, Chapter 10: Communication Climate.

Understanding and asserting our emotions is important and challenging work. Lisa Feldman Barrett is a Neuroscientist and Psychologist who also studies emotions. Her research helps us understand that we are in control of our emotions, they aren't in control of us. Take a look at her TedTalk below.

https://youtube.com/watch?v=0gks6ceq4eQ%3Ffeature%3Doembed%26rel%3D0

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is a topic that has been researched since the early 1990s and has been found to be an important indicator of life and career success. Emotional intelligence **(EQ)** refers to a form of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions (Cary, 2000). The original researchers of EQ, (Mayer & Salovey Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000) provided the first hint of emotional intelligence in their research, but much of the later research on emotional intelligence was done by Daniel Goleman (n.d.). According to Goleman, there are four main aspects to emotional intelligence.

1. **Self-awareness. Self-awareness** refers to a person's ability to understand their feelings from moment to moment. It might seem as if this is something we know, but we often go about our day without thinking or being aware of our emotions that impact how we behave in work or personal situations. Understanding our emotions can help us reduce stress and make better decisions, especially when we are under pressure. In addition, knowing and recognizing our own strengths and weaknesses is part of self-awareness. Assume that Patt is upset about a new process being implemented in the organization. Lack of self-awareness may result in her feeling angry and anxious, without really knowing why. High self-awareness EQ might cause Patt to recognize that her anger and anxiety stem from the last time the organization changed processes and fifteen people got laid off. Part of self-awareness is the idea of positive **psychological capital**, which can include emotions such as hope; optimism, which results in higher confidence; and resilience, or the ability to bounce back quickly from challenges.[8] Psychological capital can be gained through self-

awareness and self-management, which is our next area of emotional intelligence.

2. **Self-management. Self-management** refers to our ability to manage our emotions and is dependent on our self-awareness ability. How do we handle frustration, anger, and sadness? Are we able to control our behaviors and emotions? Self-management also is the ability to follow through with commitments and take initiative at work. Someone who lacks self-awareness may project stress on others. For example, say that project manager Mae is very stressed about an upcoming Monday deadline. Lack of self-management may cause Mae to lash out at people in the office because of the deadline. Higher EQ in this area might result in Mae being calm, cool, and collected—to motivate her team to focus and finish the project on time.
3. **Social awareness. Social awareness** is our ability to understand social cues that may affect others around us. In other words, understanding how another is feeling, even if we do not feel the same way. Social awareness also includes having empathy for another, recognizing power structure and unwritten workplace dynamics. Most people high on social awareness have charisma and make people feel good with every interaction. For example, consider Erik's behavior in meetings. He continually talks and does not pick up subtleties, such as body language. Because of this, he can't understand (or even fathom) that his monologues can be frustrating to others. Erik, with higher EQ in social awareness, may begin talking but also spend a lot of time listening and observing in the meeting, to get a sense of how others feel. He may also directly ask people how they feel. This demonstrates high social awareness.
4. **Relationship management. Relationship management** refers to our ability to communicate clearly, maintain good relationships with others, work well in teams, and manage conflict. Relationship management relies on your ability to use the other three areas of EQ to manage relationships effectively.

Take Caroline, for example. Caroline is good at reading people's emotions and showing empathy for them, even if she doesn't agree. As a manager, her door is always open and she makes it clear to colleagues and staff that they are welcome to speak with her anytime. If Caroline has low EQ in the area of relationship management, she may belittle people and have a difficult time being positive. She may not be what is considered a good team player, which shows her lack of ability to manage relationships.

emotional intelligence

for success

https://www.youtube-nocookie.com/embed/wJhfKYzKc0s?vq=hd1080

Video <span id="MathJax-Element-1-Frame" class="MathJax" style="display: inline; font-style: normal; font-weight: normal; line-height: normal; font-size: 17.6px; text-indent: 0px; text-align: left; text-transform: none; letter-spacing: normal; word-spacing: normal; overflow-wrap: normal; white-space: nowrap; float: none; direction: ltr; max-width: none; max-height: none; min-width: 0px; min-height: 0px; border: 0px; padding: 0px; margin: 0px; position: relative;" tabindex="0" role="presentation" data-mathml="

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Author and Pulitzer Prize nominee Daniel Goleman discusses the importance of

emotional intelligence

in career success.

To increase our self-awareness skills, we should spend time thinking about our emotions to understand why we experience a specific emotion. We should look at those things that cause a strong reaction, such as anger to help us understand the underlying reasons for that reaction. By doing this, we can begin to see a pattern within ourselves that helps explain how we behave and how we feel in certain situations. This allows us to handle those situations when they arise.

To increase our self-management skills, we can focus on the positive instead of the negative. Taking deep breaths increases blood flow, which helps us handle difficult situations. Although seemingly childish, counting to ten before reacting can help us manage emotions such as anger. This gives us time to calm down and think about how we will handle the situation. Practicing positive self-talk can help increase our self-management. Self-talk refers to the thoughts we have about ourselves and situations throughout the day. Since we have over 50,000 thoughts per day (Willax, 1999), getting into the habit of managing those thoughts is important. By recognizing the negative thoughts, we can change them for the positive. The following are some examples:

Positive	**Negative**
I made a mistake.	I am, or that was, dumb.
I need some work on xx skills.	I am an idiot.
It may take a bit more effort to show them what I have to offer.	They will never accept me.
I need to reprioritize my to do list.	I will never be able to get all of this done.
Let me see what seminars and training are available.	I just don’t have the knowledge required to do this job.

Increasing social awareness means observing others’ actions and watching people to get a good sense of how they are reacting. We can gain social awareness skills by learning people’s names and making sure we watch body language. Living in the moment can help our interactions with others as well. Practicing listening skills and asking follow-up questions can also help improve our social awareness skills.

Strategies for relationship management might include being open, acknowledging another's feelings, and showing that you care. Being willing to listen to colleagues and employees and understanding them on a personal level can help enhance relationship management skills. Being willing to accept feedback and grow from that feedback can help people be more comfortable talking with you.

Debilitative Emotions and Emotional Expression

Throughout the years there has been a big debate about the true meaning of emotions and how they can be understood. However, emotions can be defined as the state of psychological arousal, by which these feelings arises spontaneously and without any conscious attempt. This state includes thoughts, physiological changes, and actions or behaviors. Moreover, there are approximately 132 common human emotions; such as shy, sorry, mad, frustrated, happy, humiliated, annoyed, peaceful, bored and many others.

Debilitative Emotions

Debilitative emotions are harmful and difficult emotions that detract from effective functioning. The level, or intensity, of the emotion we're feeling, determines our response to the emotion. There is a difference between "a little upset" and "irate". Debilitative emotions can affect the ability to interpret emotions and most involve communication that has lead to conflict. Some intensity in emotion can be constructive but too much intensity makes the situation worse. The other part of debilitative emotions is their duration. Again, there is a difference between "momentarily" feeling a certain way and "forever" feeling a certain way. When something happens, sometimes you feel like your whole life has crashed down on you and that there's no way to pick up the pieces. One unexpected, disappointing situation does not have to completely change the core of your being. A strategy to working through these emotions is if something bad does happen, give yourself a few days to sulk over it. Because it's still important to recognize your feelings, as well as understand them, instead of completely brushing them off. After those few days are over, you can realize that there's much more out there, remind yourself about what makes you happy and remind yourself of goals you need to accomplish. Some debilitative emotions take a long time to recover from but allowing yourself to let go of grudges so that they don't affect your future communication traits and interpersonal relationships is important for emotional health.

Most emotions are the result of our way of thinking. Debilitative emotions arise from accepting a number of irrational thoughts that are called fallacies. These fallacies lead to illogical and false conclusions that turn to be debilitative emotions. We may not be aware of these thoughts, which makes them very powerful. Here are some fallacies that lead to the arousal of debilitative emotions.

Fallacy of Perfection

The fallacy of perfection is thinking we should be able to handle every situation perfectly with no room for error. We contantly strive for an unrealistic goal of perfection. We may think that others will not appreciate us if we are not "perfect" and therefore have problems admiting our mistakes. It's like tempting to try to appear perfect, but the costs of such deception are very high. If others ever find you out, they'll see u as phony. This illusion will lower your self-confidence (because nothing and no one is perfect) and may hinder others from liking you. Like everyone else, you make mistakes from time to time, and there is no reason to hide this.

Fallacy of Helplessness

The fallacy of helplessness is when people are convinced that powers beyond their control can determine their satisfaction or happiness. For example, when people say "I don't know how" or "I can't do anything about it". It's similar to being helpless or undesirable to change. The many can'ts are really rationalizations to justify not wanting to change. For instance, lonely people tend to attribute their poor interpersonal relationships to uncontrollable causes. This irrational thinking increases debilitative emotions and empowers them.

Fallacy of Catastrophic Expectations

The fallacy of catastrophic expectations is when people work on the assumption that if something bad can possibly happen, it will; by which they imagine the worst possible catastrophic consequences. For example, "If I speak regarding this issue, they will laugh at me". This in turn creates harmful debilitative emotions and a self-fulfilling prophecy will begin to build. For instance, a study revealed that people who believed that their romantic partners would not change for the better were likely to behave in ways that contributed to the breakup of the relationship.

Fallacy of Overgeneralization

The fallacy of overgeneralization comprises two types. The first occurs when we base a belief on a limited amount evidence. For instance, when we say: "I'm so stupid, I can't even figure out how to download music on my iPod." The second type takes place when we exaggerate shortcomings. For example, when we say: "you never listen to me or you are always late." These statements are always false and they lead to nothing other than anger and debilitative emotions.

Key Takeaways

1. Emotions and feelings work together but are not the same.
2. Emotions serve important functions in our relationships and lives.
3. Effectively communicating emotions takes awareness and understanding of communication strategies.
4. Emotional intelligence can be learned and is important to our emotional well-being.
5. Fallacies can lead to debilitating emotions.

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6.2 Understanding How and Why We Listen

Learning Objectives

1. Describe the stages of the listening process.
2. Discuss the four main types of listening.
3. Compare and contrast the four main listening styles.

Listening is the learned process of receiving, interpreting, recalling, evaluating, and responding to verbal and nonverbal messages. We begin to engage with the listening process long before we engage in any recognizable verbal or nonverbal communication. It is only after listening for months as infants that we begin to consciously practice our own forms of expression. In this section we will learn more about each stage of the listening process, the main types of listening, and the main listening styles.

The Listening Process

Listening is a process and as such doesn't have a defined start and finish. Like the communication process, listening has cognitive, behavioral, and relational elements and doesn't unfold in a linear, step-by-step fashion. Models of processes are informative in that they help us visualize specific components, but keep in mind that they do not capture the speed, overlapping nature, or overall complexity of the actual process in action. The stages of the listening process are receiving, interpreting, recalling, evaluating, and responding.

Receiving

Before we can engage other steps in the listening process, we must take in stimuli through our senses. In any given communication encounter, it is likely that we will return to the receiving stage many times as we process incoming feedback and new messages. This part of the listening process is more physiological than other parts, which include cognitive and relational elements. We primarily take in information needed for listening through auditory and visual channels. Although we don't often think about visual cues as a part of listening, they influence how we interpret messages. For example, seeing a person's face when we hear their voice allows us to take in nonverbal cues from facial expressions and eye contact. The fact that these visual cues are missing in e-mail, text, and phone interactions presents some difficulties for reading contextual clues into meaning received through only auditory channels.

The first stage of the listening process is receiving stimuli through auditory and visual channels.

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Perceptual filters also play a role in listening. Some stimuli never make it in, some are filtered into subconsciousness, and others are filtered into various levels of consciousness based on their salience. Recall that salience is the degree to which something attracts our attention in a particular context and that we tend to find salient things that are visually or audibly stimulating and things that meet our needs or interests. Think about how it's much easier to listen to a lecture on a subject that you find very interesting.

It is important to consider noise as a factor that influences how we receive messages. Some noise interferes primarily with hearing, which is the physical process of receiving stimuli through internal and external components of the ears and eyes, and some interferes with listening, which is the cognitive process of processing the stimuli taken in during hearing. While hearing leads to listening, they are not the same thing. Environmental noise such as other people talking, the sounds of traffic, and music interfere with the physiological aspects of hearing. Psychological noise like stress and anger interfere primarily with the cognitive processes of listening. We can enhance our ability to receive, and in turn listen, by trying to minimize noise.

Interpreting

During the interpreting stage of listening, we combine the visual and auditory information we receive and try to make meaning out of that information using schemata. The interpreting stage engages cognitive and relational processing as we take in informational, contextual, and relational cues and try to connect them in meaningful ways to previous experiences. It is through the interpreting stage that we may begin to understand the stimuli we have received. When we understand something, we are able to attach meaning by connecting information to previous experiences. Through the process of comparing new information with old information, we may also update or revise particular schemata if we find the new information relevant and credible. If we have difficulty interpreting information, meaning we don't have previous experience or information in our existing schemata to make sense of it, then it is difficult to transfer the information into our long-term memory for later recall. In situations where understanding the information we receive isn't important or isn't a goal, this stage may be fairly short or even skipped. After all, we can move something to our long-term memory by repetition and then later recall it without ever having understood it. I remember earning perfect scores on exams in my anatomy class in college because I was able to memorize and recall, for example, all the organs in the digestive system. In fact, I might still be able to do that now over a decade later. But neither then nor now could I tell you the significance or function of most of those organs, meaning I didn't really get to a level of understanding but simply stored the information for later recall.

Recalling

Our ability to recall information is dependent on some of the physiological limits of how memory works. Overall, our memories are known to be fallible. We forget about half of what we hear immediately after hearing it, recall 35 percent after eight hours, and recall 20 percent after a day (Hargie, 2011). Our memory consists of multiple "storage units," including sensory storage, short-term memory, working memory, and long-term memory (Hargie, 2011).

Our sensory storage is very large in terms of capacity but limited in terms of length of storage. We can hold large amounts of unsorted visual information but only for about a tenth of a second. By comparison, we can hold large amounts of unsorted auditory information for longer—up to four seconds. This initial memory storage unit doesn't provide much use for our study of communication, as these large but quickly expiring chunks of sensory data are primarily used in reactionary and instinctual ways.

As stimuli are organized and interpreted, they make their way to short-term memory where they either expire and are forgotten or are transferred to long-term memory. Short-term memory is a mental storage capability that can retain stimuli for twenty seconds to one minute. Long-term memory is a mental storage capability to which stimuli in short-term memory can be transferred if they are connected to existing schema and in which information can be stored indefinitely (Hargie, 2011). Working memory is a temporarily accessed memory storage space that is activated during times of high cognitive demand. When using working memory, we can temporarily store information and process and use it at the same time. This is different from our typical memory function in that information usually has to make it to long-term memory before we can call it back up to apply to a current situation. People with good working memories are able to keep recent information in mind and process it and apply it to other incoming information. This can be very useful during high-stress situations. A person in control of a command center like the White House Situation Room should have a good working memory in order to take in, organize, evaluate, and then immediately use new information instead of having to wait for that information to make it to long-term memory and then be retrieved and used.

Although recall is an important part of the listening process, there isn't a direct correlation between being good at recalling information and being a good listener. Some people have excellent memories and recall abilities and can tell you a very accurate story from many years earlier during a situation in which they should actually be listening and not showing off their recall abilities. Recall is an important part of the listening process because it is most often used to assess listening abilities and effectiveness. Many quizzes and tests in school are based on recall and are often used to assess how well students comprehended information presented in class, which is seen as an indication of how well they listened. When recall is our only goal, we excel at it. Experiments have found that people can memorize and later recall a set of faces and names with near 100 percent recall when sitting in a quiet lab and asked to do so. But throw in external noise, more visual stimuli, and multiple contextual influences, and we can't remember the name of the person we were just introduced to one minute earlier. Even in interpersonal encounters, we rely on recall to test whether or not someone was listening. Imagine that Azam is talking to his friend Belle, who is sitting across from him in a restaurant booth. Azam, annoyed that Belle keeps checking her phone, stops and asks, "Are you listening?" Belle inevitably replies, "Yes," since we rarely fess up to our poor listening habits, and Azam replies, "Well, what did I just say?"

Evaluating

When we evaluate something, we make judgments about its credibility, completeness, and worth. In terms of credibility, we try to determine the degree to which we believe a speaker's statements are correct and/or true. In terms of completeness, we try to "read between the lines" and evaluate the message in relation to what we know about the topic or situation being discussed. We evaluate the worth of a message by making a value judgment about whether we think the message or idea is good/bad, right/wrong, or desirable/undesirable. All these aspects of evaluating require critical thinking skills, which we aren't born with but must develop over time through our own personal and intellectual development.

Studying communication is a great way to build your critical thinking skills, because you learn much more about the taken-for-granted aspects of how communication works, which gives you tools to analyze and critique messages, senders, and contexts. Critical thinking and listening skills also help you take a more proactive role in the communication process rather than being a passive receiver of messages that may not be credible, complete, or worthwhile. One danger within the evaluation stage of listening is to focus your evaluative lenses more on the speaker than the message. This can quickly become a barrier to effective listening if we begin to prejudge a speaker based on his or her identity or characteristics rather than on the content of his or her message. We will learn more about how to avoid slipping into a person-centered rather than message-centered evaluative stance later in the chapter.

Responding

Responding entails sending verbal and nonverbal messages that indicate attentiveness and understanding or a lack thereof. From our earlier discussion of the communication model, you may be able to connect this part of the listening process to feedback. Later, we will learn more specifics about how to encode and decode the verbal and nonverbal cues sent during the responding stage, but we all know from experience some signs that indicate whether a person is paying attention and understanding a message or not.

We send verbal and nonverbal feedback while another person is talking and after they are done. Back-channel cues are the verbal and nonverbal signals we send while someone is talking and can consist of verbal cues like "uh-huh," "oh," and "right," and/or nonverbal cues like direct eye contact, head nods, and leaning forward. Back-channel cues are generally a form of positive feedback that indicates others are actively listening. People also send cues intentionally and unintentionally that indicate they aren't listening. If another person is looking away, fidgeting, texting, or turned away, we will likely interpret those responses negatively.

Listeners respond to speakers nonverbally during a message using back-channel cues and verbally after a message using paraphrasing and clarifying questions.

Listening –

Paraphrasing is a responding behavior that can also show that you understand what was communicated. When you paraphrase information, you rephrase the message into your own words. For example, you might say the following to start off a paraphrased response: "What I heard you say was…" or "It seems like you're saying…" You can also ask clarifying questions to get more information. It is often a good idea to pair a paraphrase with a question to keep a conversation flowing. For example, you might pose the following paraphrase and question pair: "It seems like you believe you were treated unfairly. Is that right?" Or you might ask a standalone question like "What did your boss do that made you think he was 'playing favorites?'" Make sure to paraphrase and/or ask questions once a person's turn is over because interrupting can also be interpreted as a sign of not listening. Paraphrasing is also a good tool to use in computer-mediated communication, especially since miscommunication can occur due to a lack of nonverbal and other contextual cues.

The Importance of Listening

Understanding how listening works provides the foundation we need to explore why we listen, including various types and styles of listening. In general, listening helps us achieve all the communication goals (physical, instrumental, relational, and identity) that we learned about in Chapter 1. Listening is also important in academic, professional, and personal contexts.

In terms of academics, poor listening skills were shown to contribute significantly to failure in a person's first year of college (Zabava & Wolvin, 1993). In general, students with high scores for listening ability have greater academic achievement. Interpersonal communication skills including listening are also highly sought after by potential employers, consistently ranking in the top ten in national surveys (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2010).

Poor listening skills, lack of conciseness, and inability to give constructive feedback have been identified as potential communication challenges in professional contexts. Even though listening education is lacking in our society, research has shown that introductory communication courses provide important skills necessary for functioning in entry-level jobs, including listening, writing, motivating/persuading, interpersonal skills, informational interviewing, and small-group problem solving (DiSalvo, 1980). Training and improvements in listening will continue to pay off, as employers desire employees with good communication skills, and employees who have good listening skills are more likely to get promoted.

Listening also has implications for our personal lives and relationships. We shouldn't underestimate the power of listening to make someone else feel better and to open our perceptual field to new sources of information. Empathetic listening can help us expand our self and social awareness by learning from other people's experiences and by helping us take on different perspectives. Emotional support in the form of empathetic listening and validation during times of conflict can help relational partners manage common stressors of relationships that may otherwise lead a partnership to deteriorate (Milardo & Helms-Erikson, 2000). The following list reviews some of the main functions of listening that are relevant in multiple contexts.

The main purposes of listening are (Hargie, 2011)

- to focus on messages sent by other people or noises coming from our surroundings;
- to better our understanding of other people's communication;
- to critically evaluate other people's messages;
- to monitor nonverbal signals;
- to indicate that we are interested or paying attention;
- to empathize with others and show we care for them (relational maintenance); and
- to engage in negotiation, dialogue, or other exchanges that result in a shared understanding of or agreement on an issue.

Listening Types

Listening serves many purposes, and different situations require different types of listening. The type of listening we engage in affects our communication and how others respond to us. For example, when we listen to empathize with others, our communication will likely be supportive and open, which will then lead the other person to feel "heard" and supported and hopefully view the interaction positively (Bodie & Villaume, 2003). The main types of listening we will discuss are discriminative, informational, critical, and empathetic (Watson, Barker, & Weaver III, 1995).

Discriminative Listening

Discriminative listening is a focused and usually instrumental type of listening that is primarily physiological and occurs mostly at the receiving stage of the listening process. Here we engage in listening to scan and monitor our surroundings in order to isolate particular auditory or visual stimuli. For example, we may focus our listening on a dark part of the yard while walking the dog at night to determine if the noise we just heard presents us with any danger. Or we may look for a particular nonverbal cue to let us know our conversational partner received our message (Hargie, 2011). In the absence of a hearing impairment, we have an innate and physiological ability to engage in discriminative listening. Although this is the most basic form of listening, it provides the foundation on which more intentional listening skills are built. This type of listening can be refined and honed. Think of how musicians, singers, and mechanics exercise specialized discriminative listening to isolate specific aural stimuli and how actors, detectives, and sculptors discriminate visual cues that allow them to analyze, make meaning from, or recreate nuanced behavior (Wolvin & Coakley, 1993).

Informational Listening

Informational listening entails listening with the goal of comprehending and retaining information. This type of listening is not evaluative and is common in teaching and learning contexts ranging from a student listening to an informative speech to an out-of-towner listening to directions to the nearest gas station. We also use informational listening when we listen to news reports, voice mail, and briefings at work. Since retention and recall are important components of informational listening, good concentration and memory skills are key. These also happen to be skills that many college students struggle with, at least in the first years of college, but will be expected to have mastered once they get into professional contexts. In many professional contexts, informational listening is important, especially when receiving instructions. I caution my students that they will be expected to process verbal instructions more frequently in their profession than they are in college. Most college professors provide detailed instructions and handouts with assignments so students can review them as needed, but many supervisors and managers will expect you to take the initiative to remember or record vital information. Additionally, many bosses are not as open to questions or requests to repeat themselves as professors are.

Critical Listening

Critical listening entails listening with the goal of analyzing or evaluating a message based on information presented verbally and information that can be inferred from context. A critical listener evaluates a message and accepts it, rejects it, or decides to withhold judgment and seek more information. As constant consumers of messages, we need to be able to assess the credibility of speakers and their messages and identify various persuasive appeals and faulty logic (known as fallacies), which you can learn more about in Chapter 11 "Informative and Persuasive Speaking". Critical listening is important during persuasive exchanges, but I recommend always employing some degree of critical listening, because you may find yourself in a persuasive interaction that you thought was informative. As is noted in Chapter 4 "Nonverbal Communication", people often disguise inferences as facts. Critical-listening skills are useful when listening to a persuasive speech in this class and when processing any of the persuasive media messages we receive daily. You can see judges employ critical listening, with varying degrees of competence, on talent competition shows like *Rupaul's Drag Race*, *America's Got Talent*, and *The Voice*. While the exchanges between judge and contestant on these shows is expected to be subjective and critical, critical listening is also important when listening to speakers that have stated or implied objectivity, such as parents, teachers, political leaders, doctors, and religious leaders. We will learn more about how to improve your critical thinking skills later in this chapter.

Empathetic Listening

We support others through empathetic listening by trying to "feel with" them.

Empathetic listening is the most challenging form of listening and occurs when we try to understand or experience what a speaker is thinking or feeling. Empathetic listening is distinct from sympathetic listening. While the word *empathy* means to "feel into" or "feel with" another person, *sympathy* means to "feel for" someone. Sympathy is generally more self-oriented and distant than empathy (Bruneau, 1993). Empathetic listening is other oriented and should be genuine. Because of our own centrality in our perceptual world, empathetic listening can be difficult. It's often much easier for us to tell our own story or to give advice than it is to really listen to and empathize with someone else. We should keep in mind that sometimes others just need to be heard and our feedback isn't actually desired.

Empathetic listening is key for dialogue and helps maintain interpersonal relationships. In order to reach dialogue, people must have a degree of open-mindedness and a commitment to civility that allows them to be empathetic while still allowing them to believe in and advocate for their own position. An excellent example of critical and empathetic listening in action is the international Truth and Reconciliation movement. The most well-known example of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) occurred in South Africa as a way to address the various conflicts that occurred during apartheid (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, 2012). The first TRC in the United States occurred in Greensboro, North Carolina, as a means of processing the events and aftermath of November 3, 1979, when members of the Ku Klux Klan shot and killed five members of the Communist Worker's Party during a daytime confrontation witnessed by news crews and many bystanders. The goal of such commissions is to allow people to tell their stories, share their perspectives in an open environment, and be listened to. The Greensboro TRC states its purpose as such:[1]

> The truth and reconciliation process seeks to heal relations between opposing sides by uncovering all pertinent facts, distinguishing truth from lies, and allowing for acknowledgment, appropriate public mourning, forgiveness, and healing…The focus often is on giving victims, witnesses, and even perpetrators a chance to publicly tell their stories without fear of prosecution.

1. "About," Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission website, accessed July 13, 2012, http://www.greensborotrc.org/truth_reconciliation.php.

Listening Styles

Just as there are different types of listening, there are also different styles of listening. People may be categorized as one or more of the following listeners: people-oriented, action-oriented, content-oriented, and time-oriented listeners. Research finds that 40 percent of people have more than one preferred listening style, and that they choose a style based on the listening situation (Bodie & Villaume, 2003). Other research finds that people often still revert back to a single preferred style in times of emotional or cognitive stress, even if they know a different style of listening would be better (Worthington, 2003). Following a brief overview of each listening style, we will explore some of their applications, strengths, and weaknesses.

- **People-oriented listeners** are concerned about the needs and feelings of others and may get distracted from a specific task or the content of a message in order to address feelings.
- **Action-oriented listeners** prefer well-organized, precise, and accurate information. They can become frustrated with they perceive communication to be unorganized or inconsistent, or a speaker to be "long-winded."
- **Content-oriented listeners** are analytic and enjoy processing complex messages. They like in-depth information and like to learn about multiple sides of a topic or hear multiple perspectives on an issue. Their thoroughness can be difficult to manage if there are time constraints.
- **Time-oriented listeners** are concerned with completing tasks and achieving goals. They do not like information perceived as irrelevant and like to stick to a timeline. They may cut people off and make quick decisions (taking short cuts or cutting corners) when they think they have enough information.

People-Oriented Listeners

People-oriented listeners are concerned about the emotional states of others and listen with the purpose of offering support in interpersonal relationships. People-oriented listeners can be characterized as “supporters” who are caring and understanding. These listeners are sought out because they are known as people who will “lend an ear.” They may or may not be valued for the advice they give, but all people often want is a good listener. This type of listening may be especially valuable in interpersonal communication involving emotional exchanges, as a person-oriented listener can create a space where people can make themselves vulnerable without fear of being cut off or judged. People-oriented listeners are likely skilled empathetic listeners and may find success in supportive fields like counseling, social work, or nursing. Interestingly, such fields are typically feminized, in that people often associate the characteristics of people-oriented listeners with roles filled by women.

Action-Oriented Listeners

Action-oriented listeners focus on what action needs to take place in regards to a received message and try to formulate an organized way to initiate that action. These listeners are frustrated by disorganization, because it detracts from the possibility of actually doing something. Action-oriented listeners can be thought of as “builders”—like an engineer, a construction site foreperson, or a skilled project manager. This style of listening can be very effective when a task needs to be completed under time, budgetary, or other logistical constraints. One research study found that people prefer an action-oriented style of listening in instructional contexts (Imhof, 2004). In other situations, such as interpersonal communication, action-oriented listeners may not actually be very interested in listening, instead taking a "What do you want me to do?" approach. A friend and colleague of mine who exhibits some qualities of an action-oriented listener once told me about an encounter she had with a close friend who had a stillborn baby. My friend said she immediately went into "action mode." Although it was difficult for her to connect with her friend at an emotional/empathetic level, she was able to use her action-oriented approach to help out in other ways as she helped make funeral arrangements, coordinated with other family and friends, and handled the details that accompanied this tragic emotional experience. As you can see from this example, the action-oriented listening style often contrasts with the people-oriented listening style.

Content-Oriented Listeners

Content-oriented listeners like to listen to complex information and evaluate the content of a message, often from multiple perspectives, before drawing conclusions. These listeners can be thought of as "learners," and they also ask questions to solicit more information to fill out their understanding of an issue. Content-oriented listeners often enjoy high perceived credibility because of their thorough, balanced, and objective approach to engaging with information. Content-oriented listeners are likely skilled informational and critical listeners and may find success in academic careers in the humanities, social sciences, or sciences. Ideally, judges and politicians would also possess these characteristics.

Time-Oriented Listeners

Time-oriented listeners are more concerned about time limits and timelines than they are with the content or senders of a message. These listeners can be thought of as "executives," and they tend to actually verbalize the time constraints under which they are operating.

Time-oriented listeners listen on a schedule, often giving people limits on their availability by saying, for example, "I only have about five minutes."

For example, a time-oriented supervisor may say the following to an employee who has just entered his office and asked to talk: "Sure, I can talk, but I only have about five minutes." These listeners may also exhibit nonverbal cues that indicate time and/or attention shortages, such as looking at a clock, avoiding eye contact, or nonverbally trying to close down an interaction. Time-oriented listeners are also more likely to interrupt others, which may make them seem insensitive to emotional/personal needs. People often get action-oriented and time-oriented listeners confused. Action-oriented listeners would be happy to get to a conclusion or decision quickly if they perceive that they are acting on well-organized and accurate information. They would, however, not mind taking longer to reach a conclusion when dealing with a complex topic, and they would delay making a decision if the information presented to them didn't meet their standards of organization. Unlike time-oriented listeners, action-oriented listeners are not as likely to cut people off (especially if people are presenting relevant information) and are not as likely to take short cuts.

Key Takeaways

- Getting integrated: Listening is a learned process and skill that we can improve on with concerted effort. Improving our listening skills can benefit us in academic, professional, personal, and civic contexts.
- Listening is the process of receiving, interpreting, recalling, evaluating, and responding to verbal and nonverbal messages. In the receiving stage, we select and attend to various stimuli based on salience. We then interpret auditory and visual stimuli in order to make meaning out of them based on our existing schemata. Short-term and long-term memory store stimuli until they are discarded or processed for later recall. We then evaluate the credibility, completeness, and worth of a message before responding with verbal and nonverbal signals.
- Discriminative listening is the most basic form of listening, and we use it to distinguish between and focus on specific sounds. We use informational listening to try to comprehend and retain information. Through critical listening, we analyze

and evaluate messages at various levels. We use empathetic listening to try to understand or experience what a speaker is feeling.

- People-oriented listeners are concerned with others' needs and feelings, which may distract from a task or the content of a message. Action-oriented listeners prefer listening to well-organized and precise information and are more concerned about solving an issue than they are about supporting the speaker. Content-oriented listeners enjoy processing complicated information and are typically viewed as credible because they view an issue from multiple perspectives before making a decision. Although content-oriented listeners may not be very effective in situations with time constraints, time-oriented listeners are fixated on time limits and listen in limited segments regardless of the complexity of the information or the emotions involved, which can make them appear cold and distant to some.

Exercises

1. The recalling stage of the listening process is a place where many people experience difficulties. What techniques do you use or could you use to improve your recall of certain information such as people's names, key concepts from your classes, or instructions or directions given verbally?

2. Getting integrated: Identify how critical listening might be useful for you in each of the following contexts: academic, professional, personal, and civic.
3. Listening scholars have noted that empathetic listening is the most difficult type of listening. Do you agree? Why or why not?
4. Which style of listening best describes you and why? Which style do you have the most difficulty with or like the least and why?

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6.3 Barriers to Effective Listening

Learning Objectives

1. Discuss some of the environmental and physical barriers to effective listening.
2. Explain how cognitive and personal factors can present barriers to effective listening.
3. Discuss common bad listening practices.

Barriers to effective listening are present at every stage of the listening process (Hargie, 2011). At the receiving stage, noise can block or distort incoming stimuli. At the interpreting stage, complex or abstract information may be difficult to relate to previous experiences, making it difficult to reach understanding. At the recalling stage, natural limits to our memory and challenges to concentration can interfere with remembering. At the evaluating stage, personal biases and prejudices can lead us to block people out or assume we know what they are going to say. At the responding stage, a lack of paraphrasing and questioning skills can lead to misunderstanding. In the following section, we will explore how environmental and physical factors, cognitive and personal factors, and bad listening practices present barriers to effective listening.

Environmental and Physical Barriers to Listening

Environmental factors such as lighting, temperature, and furniture affect our ability to listen. A room that is too dark can make us sleepy, just as a room that is too warm or cool can raise awareness of our physical discomfort to a point that it is distracting. Some seating arrangements facilitate listening, while others separate people. In general, listening is easier when listeners can make direct eye contact with and are in close physical proximity to a speaker. You may recall from chapter 1 that when group members are allowed to choose a leader, they often choose the person who is sitting at the center or head of the table (Andersen, 1999). Even though the person may not have demonstrated any leadership abilities, people subconsciously gravitate toward speakers that are nonverbally accessible. The ability to effectively see and hear a person increases people's confidence in their abilities to receive and process information. Eye contact and physical proximity can still be affected by noise. Additionally, environmental noises such as a whirring air conditioner, barking dogs, or a ringing fire alarm (*physical noise*) can obviously interfere with listening despite direct lines of sight and well-placed furniture.

Physiological noise, like environmental noise, can interfere with our ability to process incoming information. This is considered a physical barrier to effective listening because it emanates from our physical bodies. Physiological noise is noise stemming from a physical illness, injury, or bodily stress. Ailments such as a cold, a broken leg, a headache, or a poison ivy outbreak can range from annoying to unbearably painful and impact our listening relative to their intensity. Another type of noise, *psychological noise*, bridges physical and cognitive barriers to effective listening. Psychological noise, or noise stemming from our psychological states including moods and level of arousal, can facilitate or impede listening. Any mood or state of arousal, positive or negative, that is too far above or below our regular baseline creates a barrier to message reception and processing. The generally positive emotional state of being in love can be just as much of a barrier as feeling hatred. Excited arousal can also distract as much as anxious arousal. Stress about an upcoming events ranging from losing a job, to having surgery, to wondering about what to eat for lunch can overshadow incoming messages.

While we will explore cognitive barriers to effective listening more in the next section, psychological noise is relevant here given that the body and mind are not completely separate. In fact, they can interact in ways that further interfere with listening. Fatigue, for example, is usually a combination of psychological and physiological stresses that manifests as stress (psychological noise) and weakness, sleepiness, and tiredness (physiological noise). Additionally, mental anxiety (psychological noise) can also manifest itself in our bodies through trembling, sweating, blushing, or even breaking out in rashes (physiological noise).

Cognitive and Personal Barriers to Listening

Aside from the barriers to effective listening that may be present in the environment or emanate from our bodies, cognitive limits, a lack of listening preparation, difficult or disorganized messages, and prejudices can interfere with listening. Whether you call it multitasking, daydreaming, glazing over, or drifting off, we all cognitively process other things while receiving messages. If you think of your listening mind as a wall of ten televisions, you may notice that in some situations five of the ten televisions are tuned into one channel. If that one channel is a lecture being given by your professor, then you are exerting about half of your cognitive processing abilities on one message. In another situation, all ten televisions may be on different channels. The fact that we have the capability to process more than one thing at a time offers some advantages and disadvantages. But unless we can better understand how our cognitive capacities and personal preferences affect our listening, we are likely to experience more barriers than benefits.

Difference between Speech and Thought Rate

Our ability to process more information than what comes from one speaker or source creates a barrier to effective listening. While people speak at a rate of 125 to 175 words per minute, we can process between 400 and 800 words per minute (Hargie, 2011). This gap between speech rate and thought rate gives us an opportunity to side-process any number of thoughts that can be distracting from a more important message. Because of this gap, it is impossible to give one message our "undivided attention," but we can occupy other channels in our minds with thoughts related to the central message. For example, using some of your extra cognitive processing abilities to repeat, rephrase, or reorganize messages coming from one source allows you to use that extra capacity in a way that reinforces the primary message.

The difference between speech and thought rate connects to personal barriers to listening, as personal concerns are often the focus of competing thoughts that can take us away from listening and challenge our ability to concentrate on others' messages. Two common barriers to concentration are self-centeredness and lack of motivation (Brownell, 1993). For example, when our self-consciousness is raised, we may be too busy thinking about how we look, how we're sitting, or what others think of us to be attentive to an incoming message. Additionally, we are often challenged when presented with messages that we do not find personally relevant. In general, we employ selective attention, which refers to our tendency to pay attention to the messages that benefit us in some way and filter others out. So the student who is checking his or her Twitter feed during class may suddenly switch his or her attention back to the previously ignored professor when the following words are spoken: “This will be important for the exam.”

Drifting attention is a common barrier to listening. Try to find personal relevance in the message to help maintain concentration.

Another common barrier to effective listening that stems from the speech and thought rate divide is response preparation. Response preparation refers to our tendency to rehearse what we are going to say next while a speaker is still talking. Rehearsal of what we will say once a speaker’s turn is over is an important part of the listening process that takes place between the recalling and evaluation and/or the evaluation and responding stage. Rehearsal becomes problematic when response preparation begins as someone is receiving a message and hasn’t had time to engage in interpretation or recall. In this sense, we are listening with the goal of responding instead of with the goal of understanding, which can lead us to miss important information that could influence our response.

"Getting Plugged In"

Technology, Multitasking, and Listening

Do you like to listen to music while you do homework? Do you clean your apartment while talking to your mom on the phone? Do you think students should be allowed to use laptops in all college classrooms? Your answers to these questions will point to your preferences for multitasking. If you answered "yes" to most of them, then you are in line with the general practices of the "net generation" of digital natives for whom multitasking, especially with various forms of media, is a way of life. Multitasking is a concept that has been around for a while and emerged along with the increasing expectation that we will fill multiple role demands throughout the day. Multitasking can be pretty straightforward and beneficial—for example, if we listen to motivating music while working out. But multitasking can be very inefficient, especially when one or more of our concurrent tasks are complex or unfamiliar to us (Bardhi, Rohm, & Sultan, 2010).

Media multitasking specifically refers to the use of multiple forms of media at the same time, and it can have positive and negative effects on listening (Bardhi, Rohm, & Sultan, 2010). The negative effects of media multitasking have received much attention in recent years, as people question the decreasing attention span within our society. Media multitasking may promote inefficiency, because it can lead to distractions and plays a prominent role for many in procrastination. The numerous options for media engagement that we have can also lead to a feeling of chaos as our attention is pulled in multiple directions, creating a general sense of disorder. And many of us feel a sense of enslavement when we engage in media multitasking, as we feel like we can't live without certain personal media outlets.

Media multitasking can also give people a sense of control, as they use multiple technologies to access various points of information to solve a problem or complete a task. An employee may be able to use her iPad to look up information needed to address a concern raised during a business meeting. She could then e-mail that link to the presenter, who could share it with the room through his laptop and a LCD projector. Media multitasking can also increase efficiency, as people can carry out tasks faster. The links to videos and online articles that I've included in this textbook allow readers like you to quickly access additional information about a particular subject to prepare for a presentation or complete a paper assignment. Media multitasking can also increase engagement. Aside from just reading material in a textbook, students can now access information through an author's blog or Twitter account.

Media multitasking can produce an experience that feels productive, but is it really? What are the consequences of our media- and technology-saturated world? Although many of us like to think that we're good multitaskers, some research indicates otherwise. For example, student laptop use during class has been connected to lower academic performance (Fried, 2008). This is because media multitasking has the potential to interfere with listening at multiple stages of the process. The study showed that laptop use interfered with receiving, as students using them reported that they paid less attention to the class lectures. This is because students used the laptops for purposes other than taking notes or exploring class content. Of the students using laptops, 81 percent checked e-mail during lectures, 68 percent used instant messaging, and 43 percent surfed the web. Students using laptops also had difficulty with the interpretation stage of listening, as they found less clarity in the parts of the lecture they heard and did not understand the course material as much as students who didn't use a laptop. The difficulties with receiving and interpreting obviously create issues with recall that can lead to lower academic performance in the class. Laptop use also negatively affected the listening abilities of students not using laptops. These students reported that they were distracted, as their attention was drawn to the laptop screens of other students.

1. What are some common ways that you engage in media multitasking? What are some positive and negative consequences of your media multitasking?
2. What strategies do you or could you use to help minimize the negative effects of media multitasking?
3. Should laptops, smartphones, and other media devices be used by students during college classes? Why or why not? What restrictions or guidelines for use could instructors provide that would capitalize on the presence of such media to enhance student learning and help minimize distractions?

Lack of Listening Preparation

Another barrier to effective listening is a general lack of listening preparation. Unfortunately, most people have never received any formal training or instruction related to listening. Although some people think listening skills just develop over time, competent listening is difficult, and enhancing listening skills takes concerted effort. Even when listening education is available, people do not embrace it as readily as they do opportunities to enhance their speaking skills. After teaching communication courses for several years, I have consistently found that students and teachers approach the listening part of the course less enthusiastically than some of the other parts. Listening is often viewed as an annoyance or a chore, or just ignored or minimized as part of the communication process. In addition, our individualistic society values speaking more than listening, as it's the speakers who are sometimes literally in the spotlight. Although listening competence is a crucial part of social interaction and many of us value others we perceive to be "good listeners," listening just doesn't get the same kind of praise, attention, instruction, or credibility as speaking. Teachers, parents, and relational partners explicitly convey the importance of listening through statements like "You better listen to me," "Listen closely," and "Listen up," but these demands are rarely paired with concrete instruction. So unless you plan on taking more communication courses in the future (and I hope you do), this chapter may be the only instruction you receive on the basics of the listening process, some barriers to effective listening, and how we can increase our listening competence.

Bad Messages and/or Speakers

Bad messages and/or speakers also present a barrier to effective listening. Sometimes our trouble listening originates in the sender. In terms of message construction, poorly structured messages or messages that are too vague, too jargon filled, or too simple can present listening difficulties. In terms of speakers' delivery, verbal fillers, monotone voices, distracting movements, or a disheveled appearance can inhibit our ability to cognitively process a message (Hargie, 2011). Speakers can employ particular strategies to create listenable messages that take some of the burden off the listener by tailoring a message to be heard and processed easily. Listening also becomes difficult when a speaker tries to present too much information. Information overload is a common barrier to effective listening that good speakers can help mitigate by building redundancy into their speeches and providing concrete examples of new information to help audience members interpret and understand the key ideas.

Prejudice

Oscar Wilde said, "Listening is a very dangerous thing. If one listens one may be convinced." Unfortunately, some of our default ways of processing information and perceiving others lead us to rigid ways of thinking. When we engage in prejudiced listening, we are usually trying to preserve our ways of thinking and avoid being convinced of something different. This type of prejudice is a barrier to effective listening, because when we prejudge a person based on his or her identity or ideas, we usually stop listening in an active and/or ethical way.

We exhibit prejudice in our listening in several ways, some of which are more obvious than others. For example, we may claim to be in a hurry and only selectively address the parts of a message that we agree with or that aren't controversial. We can also operate from a state of denial where we avoid a subject or person altogether so that our views are not challenged. Prejudices that are based on a person's identity, such as race, age, occupation, or appearance, may lead us to assume that we know what he or she will say, essentially closing down the listening process. Keeping an open mind and engaging in perception checking can help us identify prejudiced listening and hopefully shift into more competent listening practices.

Bad Listening Practices

The previously discussed barriers to effective listening may be difficult to overcome because they are at least partially beyond our control. Physical barriers, cognitive limitations, and perceptual biases exist within all of us, and it is more realistic to believe that we can become more conscious of and lessen them than it is to believe that we can eliminate them altogether. Other "bad listening" practices may be habitual, but they are easier to address with some concerted effort. These bad listening practices include interrupting, distorted listening, eavesdropping, aggressive listening, narcissistic listening, and pseudo-listening.

Interrupting

Conversations unfold as a series of turns, and turn taking is negotiated through a complex set of verbal and nonverbal signals that are consciously and subconsciously received. In this sense, conversational turn taking has been likened to a dance where communicators try to avoid stepping on each other's toes. One of the most frequent glitches in the turn-taking process is interruption, but not all interruptions are considered "bad listening." An interruption could be unintentional if we misread cues and think a person is done speaking only to have him or her start up again at the same time we do. Sometimes interruptions are more like overlapping statements that show support (e.g., "I think so too.") or excitement about the conversation (e.g., "That's so cool!"). Back-channel cues like "uh-huh," as we learned earlier, also overlap with a speaker's message. We may also interrupt out of necessity if we're engaged in a task with the other person and need to offer directions (e.g., "Turn left here."), instructions (e.g., "Will you whisk the eggs?"), or warnings (e.g., "Look out behind you!"). All these interruptions are not typically thought of as evidence of bad listening unless they become distracting for the speaker or are unnecessary.

Unintentional interruptions can still be considered bad listening if they result from mindless communication. As we've already learned, intended meaning is not as important as the meaning that is generated in the interaction itself. So if you interrupt unintentionally, but because you were only half-listening, then the interruption is still evidence of bad listening. The speaker may form a negative impression of you that can't just be erased by you noting that you didn't "mean to interrupt." Interruptions can also be used as an attempt to dominate a conversation. A person engaging in this type of interruption may lead the other communicator to try to assert dominance, too, resulting in a competition to see who can hold the floor the longest or the most often. More than likely, though, the speaker will form a negative impression of the interrupter and may withdraw from the conversation.

Distorted Listening

Distorted listening occurs in many ways. Sometimes we just get the order of information wrong, which can have relatively little negative effects if we are casually recounting a story, annoying effects if we forget the order of turns (left, right, left or right, left, right?) in our driving directions, or very negative effects if we recount the events of a crime out of order, which leads to faulty testimony at a criminal trial. Rationalization is another form of distorted listening through which we adapt, edit, or skew incoming information to fit our existing schemata. We may, for example, reattribute the cause of something to better suit our own beliefs. If a professor is explaining to a student why he earned a "D" on his final paper, the student could reattribute the cause from "I didn't follow the paper guidelines" to "this professor is an unfair grader." Sometimes we actually change the words we hear to make them better fit what we are thinking. This can easily happen if we join a conversation late, overhear part of a conversation, or are being a lazy listener and miss important setup and context. Passing along distorted information can lead to negative consequences ranging from starting a false rumor about someone to passing along incorrect medical instructions from one health-care provider to the next (Hargie, 2011). Last, the addition of material to a message is a type of distorted listening that actually goes against our normal pattern of listening, which involves reducing the amount of information and losing some meaning as we take it in. The metaphor of "weaving a tall tale" is related to the practice of distorting through addition, as inaccurate or fabricated information is added to what was actually heard. Addition of material is also a common feature of gossip. An excellent example of the result of distorted listening is provided by the character Anthony Crispino on *Saturday Night Live*, who passes along distorted news on the "Weekend Update" segment. In past episodes, he has noted that Lebron James turned down the *Cleveland Show* to be on *Miami Vice* (instead of left the Cleveland Cavaliers to play basketball for the Miami Heat) and that President Obama planned on repealing the "Bush haircuts" (instead of the Bush tax cuts).

Eavesdropping

Eavesdropping is a bad listening practice that involves a calculated and planned attempt to secretly listen to a conversation. There is a difference between eavesdropping on and overhearing a conversation. Many if not most of the interactions we have throughout the day occur in the presence of other people. However, given that our perceptual fields are usually focused on the interaction, we are often unaware of the other people around us or don't think about the fact that they could be listening in on our conversation. We usually only become aware of the fact that other people could be listening in when we're discussing something private.

Eavesdropping entails intentionally listening in on a conversation that you are not a part of.

Alan Strakey – Eavesdropping – CC BY-ND 2.0.

People eavesdrop for a variety of reasons. People might think another person is talking about them behind their back or that someone is engaged in illegal or unethical behavior. Sometimes people eavesdrop to feed the gossip mill or out of curiosity (McCornack, 2007). In any case, this type of listening is considered bad because it is a violation of people's privacy. Consequences for eavesdropping may include an angry reaction if caught, damage to interpersonal relationships, or being perceived as dishonest and sneaky. Additionally, eavesdropping may lead people to find out information that is personally upsetting or hurtful, especially if the point of the eavesdropping is to find out what people are saying behind their back.

Aggressive Listening

Aggressive listening is a bad listening practice in which people pay attention in order to attack something that a speaker says (McCornack, 2007). Aggressive listeners like to ambush speakers in order to critique their ideas, personality, or other characteristics. Such behavior often results from built-up frustration within an interpersonal relationship. Unfortunately, the more two people know each other, the better they will be at aggressive listening. Take the following exchange between long-term partners:

Deb:
I've been thinking about making a salsa garden next to the side porch. I think it would be really good to be able to go pick our own tomatoes and peppers and cilantro to make homemade salsa.
Summer:
Really? When are you thinking about doing it?
Deb:
Next weekend. Would you like to help?
Summer:
I won't hold my breath. Every time you come up with some "idea of the week" you get so excited about it. But do you ever follow through with it? No. We'll be eating salsa from the store next year, just like we are now.

Although Summer's initial response to Deb's idea is seemingly appropriate and positive, she asks the question because she has already planned her upcoming aggressive response. Summer's aggression toward Deb isn't about a salsa garden; it's about a building frustration with what Summer perceives as Deb's lack of follow-through on her ideas. Aside from engaging in aggressive listening because of built-up frustration, such listeners may also attack others' ideas or mock their feelings because of their own low self-esteem and insecurities.

Narcissistic Listening

Narcissistic listening is a form of self-centered and self-absorbed listening in which listeners try to make the interaction about them (McCornack, 2007). Narcissistic listeners redirect the focus of the conversation to them by interrupting or changing the topic. When the focus is taken off them, narcissistic listeners may give negative feedback by pouting, providing negative criticism of the speaker or topic, or ignoring the speaker. A common sign of narcissistic listening is the combination of a "pivot," when listeners shift the focus of attention back to them, and "one-upping," when listeners try to top what previous speakers have said during the interaction. You can see this narcissistic combination in the following interaction:

Bryce:
My boss has been really unfair to me lately and hasn't been letting me work around my class schedule. I think I may have to quit, but I don't know where I'll find another job.
Toby:
Why are you complaining? I've been working with the same stupid boss for two years. He doesn't even care that I'm trying to get my

degree and work at the same time. And you should hear the way he talks to me in front of the other employees.

Narcissistic listeners, given their self-centeredness, may actually fool themselves into thinking that they are listening and actively contributing to a conversation. We all have the urge to share our own stories during interactions, because other people's communication triggers our own memories about related experiences. It is generally more competent to withhold sharing our stories until the other person has been able to speak and we have given the appropriate support and response. But we all shift the focus of a conversation back to us occasionally, either because we don't know another way to respond or because we are making an attempt at empathy. Narcissistic listeners consistently interrupt or follow another speaker with statements like "That reminds me of the time…," "Well, if I were you…," and "That's nothing…" (Nichols, 1995) As we'll learn later, matching stories isn't considered empathetic listening, but occasionally doing it doesn't make you a narcissistic listener.

Pseudo-listening

Do you have a friend or family member who repeats stories? If so, then you've probably engaged in pseudo-listening as a politeness strategy. Pseudo-listening is behaving as if you're paying attention to a speaker when you're actually not (McCornack, 2007). Outwardly visible signals of attentiveness are an important part of the listening process, but when they are just an "act," the pseudo-listener is engaging in bad listening behaviors. She or he is not actually going through the stages of the listening process and will likely not be able to recall the speaker's message or offer a competent and relevant response. Although it is a bad listening practice, we all understandably engage in pseudo-listening from time to time. If a friend needs someone to talk but you're really tired or experiencing some other barrier to effective listening, it may be worth engaging in pseudo-listening as a relational maintenance strategy, especially if the friend just needs a sounding board and isn't expecting advice or guidance. We may also pseudo-listen to a romantic partner or grandfather's story for the fifteenth time to prevent hurting their feelings. We should avoid pseudo-listening when possible and should definitely avoid making it a listening habit. Although we may get away with it in some situations, each time we risk being "found out," which could have negative relational consequences.

Key Takeaways

- Environmental and physical barriers to effective listening include furniture placement, environmental noise such as sounds of traffic or people talking, physiological noise such as a sinus headache or hunger, and psychological noise such as stress or anger.
- Cognitive barriers to effective listening include the difference between speech and thought rate that allows us "extra room" to think about other things while someone is talking and limitations in our ability or willingness to concentrate or pay attention. Personal barriers to effective listening include a lack of listening preparation, poorly structured and/or poorly delivered messages, and prejudice.
- There are several bad listening practices that we should avoid, as they do not facilitate effective listening:

- Interruptions that are unintentional or serve an important or useful purpose are not considered bad listening. When interrupting becomes a habit or is used in an attempt to dominate a conversation, then it is a barrier to effective listening.
- Distorted listening occurs when we incorrectly recall information, skew information to fit our expectations or existing schemata, or add material to embellish or change information.
- Eavesdropping is a planned attempt to secretly listen to a conversation, which is a violation of the speakers' privacy.
- Aggressive listening is a bad listening practice in which people pay attention to a speaker in order to attack something they say.
- Narcissistic listening is self-centered and self-absorbed listening in which listeners try to make the interaction about them by interrupting, changing the subject, or drawing attention away from others.
- Pseudo-listening is "fake listening," in that people behave like they are paying attention and listening when they actually are not.

Exercises

1. We are capable of thinking faster than the speed at which the average person speaks, which allows us some room to put mental faculties toward things other than listening. What typically makes your mind wander?
2. Bad speakers and messages are a common barrier to effective listening. Describe a time recently when your ability to listen was impaired by the poor delivery and/or content of another person.
3. Of the bad listening practices listed, which do you use the most? Why do you think you use this one more than the others? What can you do to help prevent or lessen this barrier?

Habits of Effective and Ineffective Listeners

Effective Listeners	Ineffective Listeners
Pre-listening	
• Build their background knowledge on subject before listening • Have a specific purpose for listening and attempt to ascertain speaker's purpose • Tune in and attend • Minimize distractions	• Start listening without thinking about subject • Have no specific purpose for listening and have not considered speaker's purpose • Do not focus attention • Create or are influenced by distractions
During Listening	

• Give complete attention to listening task and demonstrate interest • Search for meaning • Constantly check their understanding of message by making connections, making and confirming predictions, making inferences, evaluating, and reflecting • Know whether close or cursory listening is required; adjust their listening behaviour accordingly • Are flexible notemakers–outlining, mapping, categorizing–who sift and sort, often adding information of their own words • Take fewer, more meaningful notes • Distinguish message from speaker • Consider the context and "colour" of words	• Do not give necessary attention to listening task • Tune out that which they find uninteresting • Do not monitor understanding or use comprehension strategies • Do not distinguish whether close or cursory listening is required • Are rigid notetakers with few notemaking strategies • Try to get every word down or do not take notes at all • Judge the message by the speaker's appearance or delivery • Accept words at face value
After Listening	
• Withhold judgement until comprehension of message is complete • Will follow up on presentation by reviewing notes, categorizing ideas, clarifying, reflecting, and acting upon the message	• Jump to conclusions without reflection • Are content just to receive message without reflection or action

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6.4 Improving Listening Competence

Learning Objectives

1. Identify strategies for improving listening competence at each stage of the listening process.
2. Summarize the characteristics of active listening.
3. Apply critical-listening skills in interpersonal, educational, and mediated contexts.
4. Practice empathetic listening skills.
5. Discuss ways to improve listening competence in relational, professional, and cultural contexts.

Many people admit that they could stand to improve their listening skills. This section will help us do that. In this section, we will learn strategies for developing and improving competence at each stage of the listening process. We will also define active listening and the behaviors that go along with it. Looking back to the types of listening discussed earlier, we will learn specific strategies for sharpening our critical and empathetic listening skills. In keeping with our focus on integrative learning, we will also apply the skills we have learned in academic, professional, and relational contexts and explore how culture and gender affect listening.

Listening Competence at Each Stage of the Listening Process

We can develop competence within each stage of the listening process, as the following list indicates (Ridge, 1993):

1. To improve listening at the receiving stage,
    - prepare yourself to listen,
    - discern between intentional messages and noise,
    - concentrate on stimuli most relevant to your listening purpose(s) or goal(s),
    - be mindful of the selection and attention process as much as possible,
    - pay attention to turn-taking signals so you can follow the conversational flow, and
    - avoid interrupting someone while they are speaking in order to maintain your ability to receive stimuli and listen.
2. To improve listening at the interpreting stage,
    - identify main points and supporting points;
    - use contextual clues from the person or environment to discern additional meaning;
    - be aware of how a relational, cultural, or situational context can influence meaning;
    - be aware of the different meanings of silence; and
    - note differences in tone of voice and other paralinguistic cues that influence meaning.
3. To improve listening at the recalling stage,
    - use multiple sensory channels to decode messages and make more complete memories;
    - repeat, rephrase, and reorganize information to fit your

cognitive preferences; and
    - use mnemonic devices as a gimmick to help with recall.

4. To improve listening at the evaluating stage,

    - separate facts, inferences, and judgments;
    - be familiar with and able to identify persuasive strategies and fallacies of reasoning;
    - assess the credibility of the speaker and the message; and
    - be aware of your own biases and how your perceptual filters can create barriers to effective listening.

5. To improve listening at the responding stage,

    - ask appropriate clarifying and follow-up questions and paraphrase information to check understanding,
    - give feedback that is relevant to the speaker's purpose/ motivation for speaking,
    - adapt your response to the speaker and the context, and
    - do not let the preparation and rehearsal of your response diminish earlier stages of listening.

Active Listening

Active listening refers to the process of pairing outwardly visible positive listening behaviors with positive cognitive listening practices. Active listening can help address many of the environmental, physical, cognitive, and personal barriers to effective listening that we discussed earlier. The behaviors associated with active listening can also enhance informational, critical, and empathetic listening.

Active Listening Can Help Overcome Barriers to Effective Listening

Being an active listener starts before you actually start receiving a message. Active listeners make strategic choices and take action in order to set up ideal listening conditions. Physical and environmental noises can often be managed by moving locations or by manipulating the lighting, temperature, or furniture. When possible, avoid important listening activities during times of distracting psychological or physiological noise. For example, we often know when we're going to be hungry, full, more awake, less awake, more anxious, or less anxious, and advance planning can alleviate the presence of these barriers. For college students, who often have some flexibility in their class schedules, knowing when you best listen can help you make strategic choices regarding what class to take when. And student options are increasing, as some colleges are offering classes in the overnight hours to accommodate working students and students who are just "night owls" (Toppo, 2011). Of course, we don't always have control over our schedule, in which case we will need to utilize other effective listening strategies that we will learn more about later in this chapter.

In terms of cognitive barriers to effective listening, we can prime ourselves to listen by analyzing a listening situation before it begins. For example, you could ask yourself the following questions:

1. "What are my goals for listening to this message?"
2. "How does this message relate to me / affect my life?"
3. "What listening type and style are most appropriate for this message?"

As we learned earlier, the difference between speech and thought processing rate means listeners' level of attention varies while receiving a message. Effective listeners must work to maintain focus as much as possible and refocus when attention shifts or fades

(Wolvin & Coakley, 1993). One way to do this is to find the motivation to listen. If you can identify intrinsic and or extrinsic motivations for listening to a particular message, then you will be more likely to remember the information presented. Ask yourself how a message could impact your life, your career, your intellect, or your relationships. This can help overcome our tendency toward selective attention. As senders of messages, we can help listeners by making the relevance of what we're saying clear and offering well-organized messages that are tailored for our listeners. We will learn much more about establishing relevance, organizing a message, and gaining the attention of an audience in public speaking contexts later in the book.

Given that we can process more words per minute than people can speak, we can engage in internal dialogue, making good use of our intrapersonal communication, to become a better listener. Three possibilities for internal dialogue include covert coaching, self-reinforcement, and covert questioning; explanations and examples of each follow (Hargie, 2011):

- **Covert coaching** involves sending yourself messages containing advice about better listening, such as "You're getting distracted by things you have to do after work. Just focus on what your supervisor is saying now."
- **Self-reinforcement** involves sending yourself affirmative and positive messages: "You're being a good active listener. This will help you do well on the next exam."
- **Covert questioning** involves asking yourself questions about the content in ways that focus your attention and reinforce the material: "What is the main idea from that PowerPoint slide?" "Why is he talking about his brother in front of our neighbors?"

Internal dialogue is a more structured way to engage in active listening, but we can use more general approaches as well. I suggest that students occupy the "extra" channels in their minds with thoughts that are related to the primary message being received instead of thoughts that are unrelated. We can use those channels to resort, rephrase, and repeat what a speaker says. When we resort, we can help mentally repair disorganized messages. When we rephrase, we can put messages into our own words in ways that better fit our cognitive preferences. When we repeat, we can help messages transfer from short-term to long-term memory.

Other tools can help with concentration and memory. Mental bracketing refers to the process of intentionally separating out intrusive or irrelevant thoughts that may distract you from listening (McCornack, 2007). This requires that we monitor our concentration and attention and be prepared to let thoughts that aren't related to a speaker's message pass through our minds without us giving them much attention. Mnemonic devices are techniques that can aid in information recall (Hargie 2011). Starting in ancient Greece and Rome, educators used these devices to help people remember information. They work by imposing order and organization on information. Three main mnemonic devices are acronyms, rhymes, and visualization, and examples of each follow:

- **Acronyms.** HOMES—to help remember the Great Lakes (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, and Superior).
- **Rhyme.** "Righty tighty, lefty loosey"—to remember which way most light bulbs, screws, and other coupling devices turn to make them go in or out.
- **Visualization.** Imagine seeing a glass of port wine (which is red) and the red navigation light on a boat to help remember that the red light on a boat is always on the port side, which will also help you remember that the blue light must be on the starboard side.

Active Listening Behaviors

From the suggestions discussed previously, you can see that we can prepare for active listening in advance and engage in certain cognitive strategies to help us listen better. We also engage in active listening behaviors as we receive and process messages.

Eye contact is a key sign of active listening. Speakers usually interpret a listener's eye contact as a signal of attentiveness. While a lack of eye contact may indicate inattentiveness, it can also signal cognitive processing. When we look away to process new information, we usually do it unconsciously. Be aware, however, that your conversational partner may interpret this as not listening. If you really do need to take a moment to think about something, you could indicate that to the other person by saying, "That's new information to me. Give me just a second to think through it." We already learned the role that back-channel cues play in listening. An occasional head nod and "uh-huh" signal that you are paying attention. However, when we give these cues as a form of "autopilot" listening, others can usually tell that we are pseudo-listening, and whether they call us on it or not, that impression could lead to negative judgments.

A more direct way to indicate active listening is to reference previous statements made by the speaker. Norms of politeness usually call on us to reference a past statement or connect to the speaker's current thought before starting a conversational turn. Being able to summarize what someone said to ensure that the topic has been satisfactorily covered and understood or being able to segue in such a way that validates what the previous speaker said helps regulate conversational flow. Asking probing questions is another way to directly indicate listening and to keep a conversation going, since they encourage and invite a person to speak more. You can also ask questions that seek clarification and not just elaboration. Speakers should present complex information at a slower speaking rate than familiar information, but many will not. Remember that your nonverbal feedback can be useful for a speaker, as it signals that you are listening but also whether or not you understand. If a speaker fails to read your nonverbal feedback, you may need to follow up with verbal communication in the form of paraphrased messages and clarifying questions.

As active listeners, we want to be excited and engaged, but don't let excitement manifest itself in interruptions. Being an active listener means knowing when to maintain our role as listener and resist the urge to take a conversational turn. Research shows that people with higher social status are more likely to interrupt others, so keep this in mind and be prepared for it if you are speaking to a high-status person, or try to resist it if you are the high-status person in an interaction (Hargie, 2011).

Good note-taking skills allow listeners to stay engaged with a message and aid in recall of information.

Steven Lilley – Note taking – CC BY-SA 2.0.

Note-taking can also indicate active listening. Translating information through writing into our own cognitive structures and schemata allows us to better interpret and assimilate information. Of course, note-taking isn't always a viable option. It would be fairly awkward to take notes during a first date or a casual exchange between new coworkers. But in some situations where we wouldn't normally consider taking notes, a little awkwardness might be worth it for the sake of understanding and recalling the information. For example, many people don't think about taking notes when getting information from their doctor or banker. I actually invite students to take notes during informal meetings because I think they sometimes don't think about it or don't think it's appropriate. But many people would rather someone jot down notes instead of having to respond to follow-up questions on information that was already clearly conveyed. To help facilitate your note-taking, you might say something like "Do you mind if I jot down some notes? This seems important."

In summary, active listening is exhibited through verbal and nonverbal cues, including steady eye contact with the speaker; smiling; slightly raised eyebrows; upright posture; body position that is leaned in toward the speaker; nonverbal back-channel cues such as head nods; verbal back-channel cues such as "OK," "mmhum," or "oh"; and a lack of distracting mannerisms like doodling or fidgeting (Hargie, 2011).

"Getting Competent"

Listening in the Classroom

The following statistic illustrates the importance of listening in academic contexts: four hundred first-year students were given a listening test before they started classes. At the end of that year, 49 percent of the students with low scores were on academic probation, while only 4 percent of those who scored high were (Conaway, 1982). Listening effectively isn't something that just happens; it takes work on the part of students and teachers. One of the most difficult challenges for teachers is eliciting good listening behaviors from their students, and the method of instruction teachers use affects how a student will listen and learn (Beall et al., 2008). Given that there are different learning styles, we know that to be effective, teachers may have to find some way to appeal to each learning style. Although teachers often make this attempt, it is also not realistic or practical to think that this practice can be used all the time. Therefore, students should also think of ways they can improve their listening competence, because listening is an active process that we can exert some control over. The following tips will help you listen more effectively in the classroom:

- Be prepared to process challenging messages. You can use the internal dialogue strategy we discussed earlier to "mentally repair" messages that you receive to make them more listenable (Rubin, 1993). For example, you might say, "It seems like we've moved on to a different main point now. See if you can pull out the subpoints to help stay on track."
- Act like a good listener. While I'm not advocating that you engage in pseudo-listening, engaging in active listening behaviors can help you listen better when you are having difficulty concentrating or finding motivation to listen. Make eye contact with the instructor and give appropriate nonverbal feedback. Students often take notes only when directed to by the instructor or when there is an explicit reason to do so (e.g., to recall information for an exam or some other purpose). Since you never know what information you may want to recall later,

take notes even when it's not required that you do so. As a caveat, however, do not try to transcribe everything your instructor says or includes on a PowerPoint, because you will likely miss information related to main ideas that is more important than minor details. Instead, listen for main ideas.

- Figure out from where the instructor most frequently speaks and sit close to that area. Being able to make eye contact with an instructor facilitates listening, increases rapport, allows students to benefit more from immediacy behaviors, and minimizes distractions since the instructor is the primary stimulus within the student's field of vision.
- Figure out your preferred learning style and adopt listening strategies that complement it.
- Let your instructor know when you don't understand something. Instead of giving a quizzical look that says "What?" or pretending you know what's going on, let your instructor know when you don't understand something. Instead of asking the instructor to simply repeat something, ask her or him to rephrase it or provide an example. When you ask questions, ask specific clarifying questions that request a definition, an explanation, or an elaboration.

1. What are some listening challenges that you face in the classroom? What can you do to overcome them?
2. Take the Learning Styles Inventory survey at the following link to determine what your primary learning style is: http://www.personal.psu.edu/bxb11/LSI/LSI.htm. Do some research to identify

specific listening/studying strategies that work well for your learning style.

Becoming a Better Critical Listener

Critical listening involves evaluating the credibility, completeness, and worth of a speaker's message. Some listening scholars note that critical listening represents the deepest level of listening (Floyd, 1985). Critical listening is also important in a democracy that values free speech. The US Constitution grants US citizens the right to free speech, and many people duly protect that right for you and me. Since people can say just about anything they want, we are surrounded by countless messages that vary tremendously in terms of their value, degree of ethics, accuracy, and quality. Therefore it falls on us to responsibly and critically evaluate the messages we receive. Some messages are produced by people who are intentionally misleading, ill informed, or motivated by the potential for personal gain, but such messages can be received as honest, credible, or altruistic even though they aren't. Being able to critically evaluate messages helps us have more control over and awareness of the influence such people may have on us. In order to critically evaluate messages, we must enhance our critical-listening skills.

Some critical-listening skills include distinguishing between facts and inferences, evaluating supporting evidence, discovering your own biases, and listening beyond the message. Chapter 3 noted that part of being an ethical communicator is being accountable for what we say by distinguishing between facts and inferences (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990). This is an ideal that is not always met in practice, so a critical listener should also make these distinctions, since the speaker may not. Since facts are widely agreed-on conclusions, they can be verified as such through some extra research. Take care in your research to note the context from which the fact emerged, as speakers may take a statistic or quote out of context, distorting its meaning. Inferences are not as easy to evaluate, because they are based on unverifiable thoughts of a speaker or on speculation. Inferences are usually based at least partially on something that is known, so it is possible to evaluate whether an inference was made carefully or not. In this sense, you may evaluate an inference based on several known facts as more credible than an inference based on one fact and more speculation. Asking a question like "What led you to think this?" is a good way to get information needed to evaluate the strength of an inference.

Distinguishing facts and inferences and evaluating the credibility of supporting material are critical-listening skills that also require good informational-listening skills. In more formal speaking situations, speakers may cite published or publicly available sources to support their messages. When speakers verbally cite their sources, you can use the credibility of the source to help evaluate the credibility of the speaker's message. For example, a national newspaper would likely be more credible on a major national event than a tabloid magazine or an anonymous blog. In regular interactions, people also have sources for their information but are not as likely to note them within their message. Asking questions like "Where'd you hear that?" or "How do you know that?" can help get information needed to make critical evaluations.

Discovering your own biases can help you recognize when they interfere with your ability to fully process a message. Unfortunately, most people aren't asked to critically reflect on their identities and their perspectives unless they are in college, and even people who were once critically reflective in college or elsewhere may no longer be so. Biases are also difficult to discover because we don't see them as biases; we see them as normal or "the way things are." Asking yourself "What led you to think this?" and "How do you know that?" can be a good start toward acknowledging your biases.

Last, to be a better critical listener, think beyond the message.

A good critical listener asks the following questions: What is being said and what is not being said? In whose interests are these claims being made? Whose voices/ideas are included and excluded? These questions take into account that speakers intentionally and unintentionally slant, edit, or twist messages to make them fit particular perspectives or for personal gain. Also, ask yourself questions like "What are the other person's goals?" You can also rephrase that question and direct it toward the speaker, asking them, "What is your goal in this interaction?" When you feel yourself nearing an evaluation or conclusion, pause and ask yourself what influenced you. Although we like to think that we are most often persuaded through logical evidence and reasoning, we are susceptible to persuasive shortcuts that rely on the credibility or likability of a speaker or on our emotions rather than the strength of his or her evidence (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). So keep a check on your emotional involvement to be aware of how it may be influencing your evaluation. Also, be aware that how likable, attractive, or friendly you think a person is may also lead you to more positively evaluate his or her messages.

Other Tips to Help You Become a Better Critical Listener

- Ask questions to help get more information and increase your critical awareness when you get answers like "Because that's the way things are," "It's always been like that," "I don't know; I just don't like it," "Everyone believes that," or "It's just natural/ normal." These are not really answers that are useful in your critical evaluation and may be an indication that speakers don't really know why they reached the conclusion they did or that they reached it without much critical thinking on their part.
- Be especially critical of speakers who set up "either/or" options, because they artificially limit an issue or situation to two options when there are always more. Also be aware of people who overgeneralize, especially when those generalizations are based on stereotypical or prejudiced views. For example, the world is not just Republican or Democrat,

male or female, pro-life or pro-choice, or Christian or atheist.

- Evaluate the speaker's message instead of his or her appearance, personality, or other characteristics. Unless someone's appearance, personality, or behavior is relevant to an interaction, direct your criticism to the message.
- Be aware that critical evaluation isn't always quick or easy. Sometimes you may have to withhold judgment because your evaluation will take more time. Also keep in mind your evaluation may not be final, and you should be open to critical reflection and possible revision later.
- Avoid mind reading, which is assuming you know what the other person is going to say or that you know why they reached the conclusion they did. This leads to jumping to conclusions, which shortcuts the critical evaluation process.

"Getting Critical"

Critical Listening and Political Spin

In just the past twenty years, the rise of political fact checking occurred as a result of the increasingly sophisticated rhetoric of politicians and their representatives (Dobbs, 2012). As political campaigns began to adopt communication strategies employed by advertising agencies and public relations firms, their messages became more ambiguous, unclear, and sometimes outright misleading. While there are numerous political fact-checking sources now to which citizens can turn for an analysis of political messages, it is important that we are able to use our own critical-listening skills to see through some of the political spin that now characterizes politics in the United States.

Since we get most of our political messages through the media rather than directly from a politician, the media is a logical place to turn for guidance on fact checking. Unfortunately, the media is often manipulated by political communication strategies as well (Dobbs, 2012). Sometimes media outlets transmit messages even though a critical evaluation of the message shows that it lacks credibility, completeness, or worth. Journalists who engage in political fact checking have been criticized for putting their subjective viewpoints into what is supposed to be objective news coverage. These journalists have fought back against what they call the norm of "false equivalence." One view of journalism sees the reporter as an objective conveyer of political messages. This could be described as the "We report; you decide" brand of journalism. Other reporters see themselves as "truth seekers." In this sense, the journalists engage in some critical listening and evaluation on the part of the citizen, who may not have the time or ability to do so.

Michael Dobbs, who started the political fact-checking program at the *Washington Post*, says, "Fairness is preserved not by treating all sides of an argument equally, but through an independent, open-minded approach to the evidence" (Dobbs, 2012). He also notes that outright lies are much less common in politics than are exaggeration, spin, and insinuation. This fact puts much of political discourse into an ethical gray area that can be especially difficult for even professional fact checkers to evaluate. Instead of simple "true/false" categories, fact checkers like the *Washington Post* issue evaluations such as "Half true, mostly true, half-flip, or full-flop" to political statements. Although we all don't have the time and resources to fact check all the political statements we hear, it may be worth employing some of the strategies used by these professional fact checkers on issues that are very important to us or have major implications for others. Some fact-checking resources include http://www.PolitiFact.com, http://www.factcheck.org, and http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/fact-checker. The caution here for any critical listener is to be aware of our tendency to gravitate toward messages with which we agree and avoid or automatically reject messages with which we disagree. In short, it's often easier for us to critically evaluate the messages of politicians with whom we disagree and uncritically accept messages from those with whom we agree. Exploring the fact-check websites above can help expose ourselves to critical evaluation that we might not otherwise encounter.

1. One school of thought in journalism says it's up to the reporters to convey information as it is presented and then up to the viewer/reader to evaluate the message. The other school of thought says that the reporter should investigate and evaluate claims made by those on all sides of an issue equally and share their findings with viewers/readers. Which approach do you think is better and why?
2. In the lead-up to the war in Iraq, journalists and news outlets did not critically evaluate claims from the Bush administration that there was clear evidence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Many now cite this as an instance of failed fact checking that had global repercussions. Visit one of the fact-

checking resources mentioned previously to find other examples of fact checking that exposed manipulated messages. To enhance your critical thinking, find one example that critiques a viewpoint, politician, or political party that you typically agree with and one that you disagree with. Discuss what you learned from the examples you found.

Becoming a Better Empathetic Listener

A prominent scholar of empathetic listening describes it this way: "Empathetic listening is to be respectful of the dignity of others. Empathetic listening is a caring, a love of the wisdom to be found in others whoever they may be" (Bruneau, 1993). This quote conveys that empathetic listening is more philosophical than the other types of listening. It requires that we are open to subjectivity and that we engage in it because we genuinely see it as worthwhile.

Combining active and empathetic listening leads to active-empathetic listening. During active-empathetic listening, a listener becomes actively and emotionally involved in an interaction in such a way that it is conscious on the part of the listener and perceived by the speaker (Bodie, 2011). To be a better empathetic listener, we need to suspend or at least attempt to suppress our judgment of the other person or their message so we can fully attend to both. Paraphrasing is an important part of empathetic listening because it helps us put the other person's words into our frame of experience without making it about us. In addition, speaking the words of someone else in our own way can help evoke within us the feeling that the other person felt while saying them (Bodie, 2011). Active-empathetic listening is more than echoing back verbal messages.

We can also engage in mirroring, which refers to a listener's replication of the nonverbal signals of a speaker (Bruneau, 1993). Therapists, for example, are often taught to adopt a posture and tone similar to their patients in order to build rapport and project empathy.

Empathetic listeners should not steal the spotlight from the speaker. Offer support without offering your own story or advice.

Blondinrikard Froberg – Spotlight – CC BY 2.0.

Paraphrasing and questioning are useful techniques for empathetic listening because they allow us to respond to a speaker without taking "the floor," or the attention, away for long. Specifically, questions that ask for elaboration act as "verbal door openers," and inviting someone to speak more and then validating their speech through active listening cues can help a person feel "listened to" (Hargie, 2011). I've found that paraphrasing and asking questions are also useful when we feel tempted to share our own stories and experiences rather than maintaining our listening role. These questions aren't intended to solicit more information, so we can guide or direct the speaker toward a specific course of action. Although it is easier for us to slip into an advisory mode—saying things like "Well if I were you, I would…"—we have to resist the temptation to give unsolicited advice.

Empathetic listening can be worthwhile, but it also brings challenges. In terms of costs, empathetic listening can use up time and effort. Since this type of listening can't be contained within a proscribed time frame, it may be especially difficult for time-oriented listeners (Bruneau, 1993). Empathetic listening can also be a test of our endurance, as its orientation toward and focus on supporting the other requires the processing and integration of much verbal and nonverbal information. Because of this potential strain, it's important to know your limits as an empathetic listener. While listening can be therapeutic, it is not appropriate for people without training and preparation to try to serve as a therapist. Some people have chronic issues that necessitate professional listening for the purposes of evaluation, diagnosis, and therapy. Lending an ear is different from diagnosing and treating. If you have a friend who is exhibiting signs of a more serious issue that needs attention, listen to the extent that you feel comfortable and then be prepared to provide referrals to other resources that have training to help. To face these challenges, good empathetic listeners typically have a generally positive self-concept and self-esteem, are nonverbally sensitive and expressive, and are comfortable with embracing another person's subjectivity and refraining from too much analytic thought.

Becoming a Better Contextual Listener

Active, critical, and empathetic listening skills can be helpful in a variety of contexts. Understanding the role that listening plays in professional, relational, cultural, and gendered contexts can help us more competently apply these skills. Whether we are listening to or evaluating messages from a supervisor, parent, or intercultural conversational partner, we have much to gain or lose based on our ability to apply listening skills and knowledge in various contexts.

Listening in Professional Contexts

Listening and organizational-communication scholars note that listening is one of the most neglected aspects of organizational-communication research (Flynn, Valikoski, & Grau, 2008). Aside from a lack of research, a study also found that business schools lack curriculum that includes instruction and/or training in communication skills like listening in their master of business administration (MBA) programs (Alsop, 2002). This lack of a focus on listening persists, even though we know that more effective listening skills have been shown to enhance sales performance and that managers who exhibit good listening skills help create open communication climates that can lead to increased feelings of supportiveness, motivation, and productivity (Flynn, Valikoski, & Grau, 2008). Specifically, empathetic listening and active listening can play key roles in organizational communication. Managers are wise to enhance their empathetic listening skills, as being able to empathize with employees contributes to a positive communication climate. Active listening among organizational members also promotes involvement and increases motivation, which leads to more cohesion and enhances the communication climate.

Organizational scholars have examined various communication climates specific to listening. Listening environment refers to characteristics and norms of an organization and its members that contribute to expectations for and perceptions about listening (Brownell, 1993). Positive listening environments are perceived to be more employee centered, which can improve job satisfaction and cohesion. But how do we create such environments?

Positive listening environments are facilitated by the breaking down of barriers to concentration, the reduction of noise, the creation of a shared reality (through shared language, such as similar jargon or a shared vision statement), intentional spaces that promote listening, official opportunities that promote listening, training in listening for all employees, and leaders who model good listening practices and praise others who are successful listeners (Brownell, 1993). Policies and practices that support listening must go hand in hand. After all, what does an "open-door" policy mean if it is not coupled with actions that demonstrate the sincerity of the policy?

"Getting Real"

Becoming a "Listening Leader"

Dr. Rick Bommelje has popularized the concept of the "listening leader" (Listen-Coach.com, 2012). As a listening coach, he offers training and resources to help people in various career paths increase their listening competence. For people who are very committed to increasing their listening skills, the International Listening Association has now endorsed a program to become a Certified Listening Professional (CLP), which entails advanced independent study, close work with a listening mentor, and the completion of a written exam.[1] There are also training

1. "CLP Training Program," *International Listening Assocation*, accessed July 13, 2012, http://www.listen.org/CLPFAQs.

programs to help with empathetic listening that are offered through the Compassionate Listening Project.[2] These programs evidence the growing focus on the importance of listening in all professional contexts.

Scholarly research has consistently shown that listening ability is a key part of leadership in professional contexts and competence in listening aids in decision making. A survey sent to hundreds of companies in the United States found that poor listening skills create problems at all levels of an organizational hierarchy, ranging from entry-level positions to CEOs (Hargie, 2011). Leaders such as managers, team coaches, department heads, and executives must be versatile in terms of listening type and style in order to adapt to the diverse listening needs of employees, clients/customers, colleagues, and other stakeholders.

Even if we don't have the time or money to invest in one of these professional-listening training programs, we can draw inspiration from the goal of becoming a listening leader. By reading this book, you are already taking an important step toward improving a variety of communication competencies, including listening, and you can always take it upon yourself to further your study and increase your skills in a particular area to better prepare yourself to create positive communication climates and listening environments. You can also use these skills to make yourself a more desirable employee.

2. "Training," *The Compassionate Listening Project*, accessed July 13, 2012, http://www.compassionatelistening.org/trainings.

1. Make a list of the behaviors that you think a listening leader would exhibit. Which of these do you think you do well? Which do you need to work on?
2. What do you think has contributed to the perceived shortage of listening skills in professional contexts?
3. Given your personal career goals, what listening skills do you think you will need to possess and employ in order to be successful?

Listening in Relational Contexts

Listening plays a central role in establishing and maintaining our relationships (Nelson-Jones, 2006). Without some listening competence, we wouldn't be able to engage in the self-disclosure process, which is essential for the establishment of relationships. Newly acquainted people get to know each other through increasingly personal and reciprocal disclosures of personal information. In order to reciprocate a conversational partner's disclosure, we must process it through listening. Once relationships are formed, listening to others provides a psychological reward, through the simple act of recognition, that helps maintain our relationships. Listening to our relational partners and being listened to in return is part of the give-and-take of any interpersonal relationship. Our thoughts and experiences "back up" inside of us, and getting them out helps us maintain a positive balance (Nelson, Jones, 2006). So something as routine and seemingly pointless as listening to our romantic partner debrief the events of his or her day or our roommate recount his or her weekend back home shows that we are taking an interest in their lives and are willing to put our own needs and concerns aside for a moment to attend to their needs. Listening also closely ties to conflict, as a lack of listening often plays a large role in creating conflict, while effective listening helps us resolve it.

Listening has relational implications throughout our lives, too. Parents who engage in competent listening behaviors with their children from a very young age make their children feel worthwhile and appreciated, which affects their development in terms of personality and character (Nichols, 1995).

Parents who exhibit competent listening behaviors toward their children provide them with a sense of recognition and security that affects their future development.

Madhavi Kuram – Listen to your kids – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

A lack of listening leads to feelings of loneliness, which results in lower self-esteem and higher degrees of anxiety. In fact, by the age of four or five years old, the empathy and recognition shown by the presence or lack of listening has molded children's personalities in noticeable ways (Nichols, 1995). Children who have been listened to grow up expecting that others will be available and receptive to them. These children are therefore more likely to interact confidently with teachers, parents, and peers in ways that help develop communication competence that will be built on throughout their lives. Children who have not been listened to may come to expect that others will not want to listen to them, which leads to a lack of opportunities to practice, develop, and hone foundational communication skills. Fortunately for the more-listened-to children and unfortunately for the less-listened-to children, these early experiences become predispositions that don't change much as the children get older and may actually reinforce themselves and become stronger.

Listening and Culture

Some cultures place more importance on listening than other cultures. In general, collectivistic cultures tend to value listening more than individualistic cultures that are more speaker oriented. The value placed on verbal and nonverbal meaning also varies by culture and influences how we communicate and listen. A low-context communication style is one in which much of the meaning generated within an interaction comes from the verbal communication used rather than nonverbal or contextual cues. Conversely, much of the meaning generated by a high-context communication style comes from nonverbal and contextual cues (Lustig & Koester, 2006). For example, US Americans of European descent generally use a low-context communication style, while people in East Asian and Latin American cultures use a high-context communication style.

Contextual communication styles affect listening in many ways. Cultures with a high-context orientation generally use less verbal communication and value silence as a form of communication, which requires listeners to pay close attention to nonverbal signals and consider contextual influences on a message. Cultures with a low-context orientation must use more verbal communication and provide explicit details, since listeners aren't expected to derive meaning from the context. Note that people from low-context cultures may feel frustrated by the ambiguity of speakers from high-context cultures, while speakers from high-context cultures may feel overwhelmed or even insulted by the level of detail used by low-context communicators. Cultures with a low-context communication style also tend to have a monochronic orientation toward time, while high-context cultures have a polychronic time orientation, which also affects listening.

Cultures that favor a structured and commodified orientation toward time are said to be monochronic, while cultures that favor a more flexible orientation are polychronic. Monochronic cultures like the United States value time and action-oriented listening styles, especially in professional contexts, because time is seen as a commodity that is scarce and must be managed (McCorncack, 2007). This is evidenced by leaders in businesses and organizations who often request "executive summaries" that only focus on the most relevant information and who use statements like "Get to the point." Polychronic cultures value people and content-oriented listening styles, which makes sense when we consider that polychronic cultures also tend to be more collectivistic and use a high-context communication style. In collectivistic cultures, indirect communication is preferred in cases where direct communication would be considered a threat to the other person's face (desired public image). For example, flatly turning down a business offer would be too direct, so a person might reply with a "maybe" instead of a "no." The person making the proposal, however, would be able to draw on contextual clues that they implicitly learned through socialization to interpret the "maybe" as a "no."

Listening and Gender

Research on gender and listening has produced mixed results. As we've already learned, much of the research on gender differences and communication has been influenced by gender stereotypes and falsely connected to biological differences. More recent research has found that people communicate in ways that conform to gender stereotypes in some situations and not in others, which shows that our communication is more influenced by societal expectations than by innate or gendered "hard-wiring." For example, through socialization, men are generally discouraged from expressing emotions in public. A woman sharing an emotional experience with a man may perceive the man's lack of emotional reaction as a sign of inattentiveness, especially if he typically shows more emotion during private interactions. The man, however, may be listening but withholding nonverbal expressiveness because of social norms. He may not realize that withholding those expressions could be seen as a lack of empathetic or active listening. Researchers also dispelled the belief that men interrupt more than women do, finding that men and women interrupt each other with similar frequency in cross-gender encounters (Dindia, 1987). So men may interrupt each other more in same-gender interactions as a conscious or subconscious attempt to establish dominance because such behaviors are expected, as men are generally socialized to be more competitive than women. However, this type of competitive interrupting isn't as present in cross-gender interactions because the contexts have shifted.

Key Takeaways

- You can improve listening competence at the receiving stage by preparing yourself to listen and distinguishing between intentional messages and noise; at the interpreting stage by identifying main points and supporting points and taking multiple contexts into consideration; at the recalling stage by creating memories using multiple senses and repeating, rephrasing, and reorganizing messages to fit cognitive preferences; at the evaluating stage by separating facts from inferences and assessing the credibility of the speaker's message; and at the responding stage by asking appropriate questions, offering paraphrased messages, and adapting your response to the speaker and the situation.
- Active listening is the process of pairing outwardly visible positive listening behaviors with positive cognitive listening practices and is characterized by mentally preparing yourself to listen, working to maintain focus on concentration, using appropriate verbal and nonverbal back-channel cues to signal attentiveness, and engaging in strategies like note taking and mentally reorganizing information to help with recall.
- In order to apply critical-listening skills in multiple contexts, we must be able to distinguish between facts and inferences, evaluate a speaker's supporting evidence, discover our own biases, and think beyond the message.
- In order to practice empathetic listening skills, we

must be able to support others' subjective experience; temporarily set aside our own needs to focus on the other person; encourage elaboration through active listening and questioning; avoid the temptation to tell our own stories and/or give advice; effectively mirror the nonverbal communication of others; and acknowledge our limits as empathetic listeners.

- Getting integrated: Different listening strategies may need to be applied in different listening contexts.
    - In professional contexts, listening is considered a necessary skill, but most people do not receive explicit instruction in listening. Members of an organization should consciously create a listening environment that promotes and rewards competent listening behaviors.
    - In relational contexts, listening plays a central role in initiating relationships, as listening is required for mutual self-disclosure, and in maintaining relationships, as listening to our relational partners provides a psychological reward in the form of recognition. When people aren't or don't feel listened to, they may experience feelings of isolation or loneliness that can have negative effects throughout their lives.
    - In cultural contexts, high- or low-context communication styles, monochronic or polychronic orientations toward time, and individualistic or collectivistic cultural values affect listening preferences and behaviors.

- Research regarding listening preferences and behaviors of men and women has been contradictory. While some differences in listening exist, many of them are based more on societal expectations for how men and women should listen rather than biological differences.

Exercises

1. Keep a "listening log" for part of your day. Note times when you feel like you exhibited competent listening behaviors and note times when listening became challenging. Analyze the log based on what you have learned in this section. Which positive listening skills helped you listen? What strategies could you apply to your listening challenges to improve your listening competence?
2. Apply the strategies for effective critical listening to a political message (a search for "political speech" or "partisan speech" on YouTube should provide you with many options). As you analyze the speech, make sure to distinguish between facts and inferences, evaluate a speaker's supporting evidence, discuss how your own biases may influence your evaluation, and think beyond the message.
3. Discuss and analyze the listening environment of a place you have worked or an organization with which you were involved. Overall, was it positive or

negative? What were the norms and expectations for effective listening that contributed to the listening environment? Who helped set the tone for the listening environment?

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6.5 Communication Styles

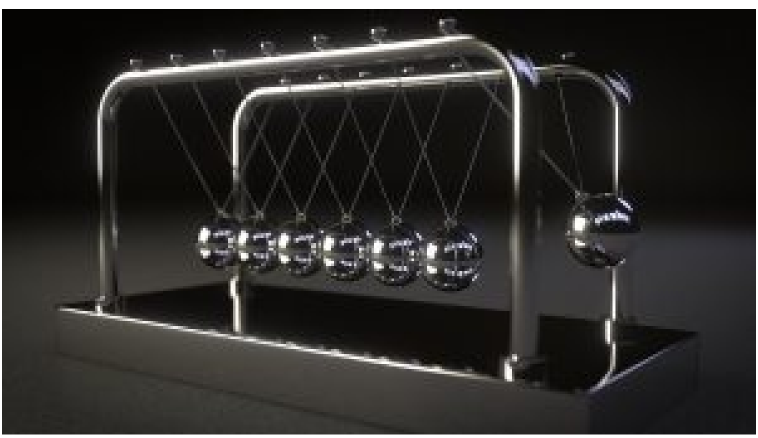
Learning Objectives

Type your learning objectives here.

- Differentiate approaches to communication
- Explain passive, aggressive, passive-aggressive, and assertive behaviors.

Most of us tend to have a consistent way we relate to communication. This section will explore common communication styles.

The Passive – Assertive – Aggressive Continuum



People tend to relate to communication based on one of three styles.

Passive Communication

Nonassertive or passive approaches ignore disputes in the hope that they will go away soon. Passive communications may hope by their silence or non-involvement and that the dispute will "solve itself." Passivity is failing to express honest feelings, thoughts, and beliefs or expressing one's thoughts and feelings in such an apologetic, self-effacing manner that others can easily disregard what they have to say. The basic message of passivity is "My feelings don't matter – only yours do. My thoughts aren't important – yours are the only ones worth listening to." Passive people live in a Lose/Win situation. They lose while others win. The goal of passivity is to appease others and to avoid conflict at any cost.

Nonassertive or passive people may complain, but usually do nothing to gain control in their argumentative environment, because they fear they will lose from additional conflict encounters. For example, you go into a restaurant and order a steak dinner. You ask for the steak to be cooked medium, but when the meal is served, the steak is rare. Instead of sending the steak back, the nonassertive person will eat it (but not like it), pick at it, or let it sit. When asked by the server if everything is okay, the nonassertive person will respond by saying yes. The passive person does not want to risk engaging in conflict by complaining about the meal. Nonassertive people can rationalize that it was their fault the steak was served incorrectly; they must have not made their order clear; or that it is not important because they don't have to come back to the restaurant again.

Aggressive Communication

On the other end of the behavioral scale is the aggressive person.

Aggressive people directly stand up for what they believe by expressing thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in a way that is often dishonest, inappropriate, and violates the rights of others. The basic message of aggression is: This is what I think – you're stupid for believing differently. This is what I want – what you want is not important. This is what I feel – your feelings don't count. The goal of aggression is domination and winning, forcing the other person to lose. Winning is ensured by humiliating, degrading, belittling, or overpowering other people so that they become weaker or less able to express and defend their needs and rights.

Aggressive arguers see conflict from a win-lose perspective. Aggressive behavior usually involves reacting to situations by trying to overpower a person (opponent) through verbal abuse. They do not want to be on the losing end and will do anything to win. Aggressors may use name-calling and high-intensity language to intimidate the other party. If the aggressor was served a meal he or she didn't like, he or she would call the server and verbally berate him or her for serving such a lousy meal.

Assertive Communication

In between Aggressive and Non-Assertive or Passive behavior is Assertiveness.

Assertive approaches are a combination of the two ends of the behavior spectrum. Assertiveness takes the ability to stand up for one's position, but in a way that does not hurt the other person. The goal is long-term resolution. Here a person stands up for personal rights and expresses thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in direct, honest, and appropriate ways that do not violate another person's rights.

The basic message of assertion is: This is what I think. This is what I feel. This is how I see the situation. But it does not deny that the other people involved have a right to their point of view.

The goal of assertion is communication and mutuality; that is, to get and give respect, to ask for fair play, and to leave room for compromise, weighing the rights and needs of both parties. Assertive people feel that they are active agents for change. As such, the assertive person wants to resolve conflict in a positive way by engaging in a conflict and argument. The assertive communicator's objective is to set up a win-win or no-lose approach to problem-solving. The assertive approach seeks a long-term, cooperative resolution to any conflict situation.

If the assertive person is served a meal they didn't like, he or she would politely call over the server and explain that the meal was not prepared per the order. They may ask that another meal be served. The goal is to have an enjoyable meal, not to hurt or make someone, like the server, feel bad.

	Passive	**Assertive**	**Aggressive**
Definition	Communication style in which you put the rights of others before your own, minimizing your own self-worth	Communication style in which you stand up for your rights while maintaining respect for the rights of others	Communication style in which you stand up for your rights but you violate the rights of others
Implications to others	My feelings are not important I don't matter I think I'm inferior	We are both important We both matter I think we are equal	Your feelings are not important You don't matter I think I'm superior
Verbal styles	Apologetic Overly soft or tentative voice	I statements Firm voice	You statements Loud voice
Nonverbal styles	Looking down or away Stooped posture, excessive head nodding	Looking direct Relaxed posture, smooth and relaxed movements	Staring, narrow eyes Tense, clenched fists, rigid posture, pointing fingers
Potential consequences	Lowered self-esteem Anger at self False feelings of inferiority Disrespect from others Pitied by others	High self-esteem Self-respect Respect from others Respect of others	Anger from others Lowered self-esteem Disrespect from others Feared by others

Passive Aggressive Communication

In between the Aggressive and Assertive behavior is what we call**,** *Passive Aggressive or Indirect aggression***.** The behavior expresses hostility in obscure ways that usually cause more anger and conflict. Indirect aggression avoids direct confrontation. Instead, the individual will vent his or her anger at the other person in an indirect fashion (Adler and Towne, 2002).

Examples of Indirect Aggression

- **Guiltmakers:** They make the other party feel guilty to get them to agree with their point of view.
- **Subject changers:** They avoid your topic in favor of one they can win.
- **Jokers**: They try to turn every argument into a laughing matter.
- **Blamers**: They believe conflict is always someone else's fault.
- **Backstabbers**: They talk negatively about someone behind their back.
- **Withholders**: They refuse to reveal what they really feel or wan
- **Trappers**: They set verbal traps to create a fight they feel they can win.
- **Kitchen-sink fighters:** They throw everything into an argument, causing the argument to lose focus.

If an indirect aggressor was served a meal he or she did not like, he or she might leave no tip or bad-mouth the restaurant to others by spreading rumors about the lack of quality in food preparation or service. The indirect aggressor hopes to get even with the restaurant for serving him a bad meal by discouraging others from going there.

Which conflict resolution style is best? Actually, there is no one best style. Each style may be appropriate or inappropriate to the goals of the situation. It would be an overstatement to say that the assertive style is always the best way to deal with conflict resolution. If the time is short, there is an emergency, and you are dealing with a dogmatic individual, then using an Aggressive style might be appropriate. In most situations, however, it is suggested that an Assertive approach should be the critical thinker's first choice in responding to a conflict situation. Critical thinkers have nothing to lose by trying the assertive approach first. If it fails, they can always move to a more aggressive conflict resolution stance. However, one of the drawbacks to no-lose conflict resolution is that the process usually requires a rational sender and a rational receiver. Without both, the assertive approach can be challenging.

Key Takeaways

1. People tend to approach communication with passive, aggressive, passive-aggressive, or assertive behaviors.
2. Each style may be appropriate for different contexts.
3. While assertive communication is the goal in most situations, it may not be feasible.

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6.6 Relationship Dialectics

Learning Objectives

1. Analyze relationship dialectics.
2. Explain different ways of managing dialectical tensions.

Relationship Dialectics

We know that all relationships go through change. The changes in a relationship are usually dependent on communication. When a relationship starts, there is a lot of positive and ample communication between the parties. However, sometimes couples go through a redundant problem, and it is important to learn how to deal with this problem. Partners can't always know what their significant other desires or needs from them.

Dialectics had been a concept known well to many scholars for many years. They are simply the pushes and pulls that can be found every day in relationships of all types. Conversation involves people who must learn to adapt to each other while still maintaining their individuality (Baxter, 2004). The theory emphasizes interactions allowing for more flexibility to explain how couples maintain a satisfactory, cohesive union. This perspective views relationships as simply managing the tensions that arise because they cannot be fully resolved. The management of the tensions is usually based on past experiences; what worked for a person in the past will be what they decide to use in the future. These tensions are both contradictory and interdependent because without one, the other is not understood. Leslie A. Baxter, the scholar who developed this theory, pulled from as many outside sources as she could to better understand the phenomenon of dialectical tensions within relationships.

Dialectical tension is how individuals deal with struggles in their relationships. There are opposing forces or struggles that couples have to deal with. It is based on Leslie Baxter and Barbara Montgomery's Relational Dialectics Theory in 1996.

Below are some different relational dialectics (Baxter, 1996).

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Autonomy-Connection

This is a need to have a close connection with others as well as our need to have our own space and identity. We may miss our romantic partners when they are away but simultaneously enjoy and cherish that alone time. When you first enter a relationship, you probably want to be around the other person as much as possible. As the relationship grows, you likely begin to desire fulfilling your need for autonomy, or alone time. In every relationship, each person must balance how much time to spend with the other, versus how much time to spend alone.

Predictability–Novelty

We desire predictability as well as spontaneity in our relationships. In every relationship, we take comfort in a certain level of routine as a way of knowing what we can count on the other person in the relationship. Such predictability provides a sense of comfort and security. However, it requires balance with novelty to avoid boredom. An example of balance might be friends who get together every Saturday for brunch but make a commitment to always try new restaurants each week.

Openness–Closedness

This dialectic refers to the desire to be open and honest with others while at the same time not wanting to reveal everything about yourself to someone else. One's desire for privacy does not mean they are shutting out others. It is a normal human need. We tend to disclose the most personal information to those with whom we have the closest relationships. However, even these people do not know everything about us.

Similarity-Difference

This tension deals with self vs. others. Some couples are very similar in their thinking and beliefs. This is good because it makes communication easier and conflict resolution smoother. Yet, if partners are too similar, then they cannot grow. Differences can help couples mature and create stimulation.

Ideal-Real

Couples will perceive some things as good and some things as bad. Their perceptions of what is ideal may interfere with or inhibit perceptions of what is real. For instance, a couple may think that their relationship is perfect. But from an outsider, they might think that the relationship is abusive and devastating.

Managing Dialectics

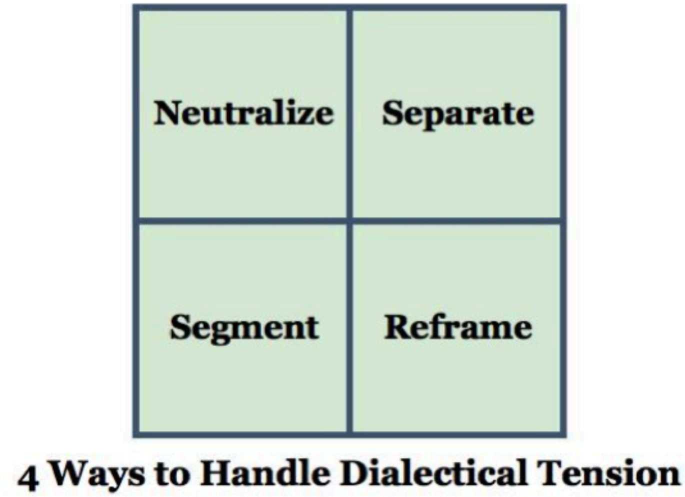
Relational dialectics are a natural part of our relationships, and there is no one right way to understand and manage dialectical tensions since every relationship is unique. However, to always satisfy one need and ignore the other may be a sign of trouble in the relationship (Baxter, 1988). Therefore it is important to reflect on both partner's dialectics needs and to remember that we have a lot of choice, freedom, and creativity in how we work them out with our relational partners. It is also important to remember that dialectical tensions are negotiated differently in each relationship. The ways we manage dialectical tensions contribute greatly to the communication climate in relationships.

- **Neutralize:**
  The first option is to neutralize the extremes of the dialectical tensions. Here, individuals compromise, creating a solution where neither person's need (such as novelty or predictability) is fully satisfied. Individual needs may be different and never fully realized. For example, if one person seeks a great deal of autonomy, and the other person in the relationship seeks a great deal of connection, neutralization would not make it possible for either person to have their desires met. Instead, each person might feel like they are not getting quite enough of their particular need met.

- **Separation:**
  The second option is separation. This is when someone favors one end of the dialectical continuum and ignores the other, or alternates between the extremes. For example, a couple in a

long-distance relationship in which each person works in a different city may decide to live apart during the week (autonomy) and be together on the weekends (connection). In this sense, they are alternating between the extremes by being completely alone during the week, yet completely together on the weekends.

- **Segmentation:**
  When people decide to divide their lives into spheres they are practicing segmentation. For example, your extended family may be very close and choose to spend religious holidays together. However, members of your extended family might reserve other special days such as birthdays for celebrating with friends. This approach divides needs according to the different segments of your life.
- **Reframing:**
  The final option for dealing with these tensions is a creative technique called reframing. This strategy requires creativity not only in managing the tensions, but also in understanding how they work in the relationship. For example, the two ends of the dialectic are not viewed as opposing or contradictory at all. Instead, they are understood as supporting the other need, as well as the relationship itself. A couple who does not live together, for example, may agree to spend two nights of the week alone or with friends as a sign of their autonomy. The time spent alone or with others may be viewed less as a compromise and more as an opportunity to develop themselves and their own interests so that they are better able to share themselves with their partner and enhance their connection.

- 

  (Image: [Spaynton](), [CC BY-SA 4.0)]()

  In section 8.2.3.1, we discussed the three dialectics that influence relationship dynamics: autonomy-connection, novelty-predictability, and openness-closedness. Understanding that these three dialectical tensions are at play in all relationships is a first step in understanding how our relationships work. Since the way we communicate our needs (or don't communicate them) and respond to the needs of others can have both a short and long-term impact on our relationships, we need to learn how to manage dialectics to enhance relationship satisfaction. Depending on the relational context (the nature of the relationship between two people), couples, friends, or family members may have different strategies for managing these tensions in an attempt to meet the needs of each person. Baxter (1988) identifies four ways we can handle dialectical tensions.

Other ways of managing dialectical tensions may be:

- *Denial* is where we lean toward one end of the dialectic and ignore that the other side exists.
- *Disorientation* is where we feel overwhelmed and we may fight,

freeze, or leave.

• *Alternation* is where we choose one end on different occasions based on contextual elements of the situation.

• *Recalibration* is reframing the situation or perspective. Think perception checking and working out alternatives to current perspectives.

• *Segmentation* is where we compartmentalize different areas. We may choose one side of a dialectic in our communication and one side of a dialectic in our time spent together.

• *Balance* is where we manage and compromise our needs.

• *Integration* is blending different perspectives.

• *Reaffirmation* is having the knowledge & accepting our differences.

Understanding our dialectical perspectives can help us to communicate our needs in relationships. Not everyone deals with dialectical tensions in the same way and there is no perfect way to balance dialectics. Some people will use a certain strategy during specific situations, and others will use the same strategy every time there is tension. You have to decide what is best for your relationship based on the situation.

Key Takeaways

1. Relationship dialectics are tensions that happen in a relationship.
2. Understanding our dialectical perspectives can help us to communicate more effectively in our relationships.

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PART VII

CHAPTER 7: RESOLVING INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT

Taking an interpersonal communication course as an undergraduate is what made me change my major from music to communication studies. I was struck by the clear practicality of key interpersonal communication concepts in my everyday life and in my relationships. I found myself thinking, “Oh, that’s what it’s called!” or “My mom does that to me all the time!” I hope that you will have similar reactions as we learn more about how we communicate with the people in our daily lives.

7.1 Communication Climate

Learning Objectives

Type your learning objectives here.

- Explain communication climate.
- Differentiate confirming and disconfirming messages.

Communication Climate

Do you feel organized or confined in a clean work-space? Are you more productive when the sun is shining than when it's gray and cloudy outside? Just as factors like weather and physical space impact us, communication climate influences our interpersonal interactions. *Communication climate* is the "overall feeling or emotional mood between people" (Wood, 1999). If you dread going to visit your family during the holidays because of tension between you and your sister, or you look forward to dinner with a particular set of friends because they make you laugh, you are responding to the communication climate—the overall mood that is created because of the people involved and the type of communication they bring to the interaction.

Interpersonal Communication Now: "Sticks and Stones Can Break my Bones But Words Can Hurt Me Too"

In a study published in the journal Science, researchers reported that the sickening feeling we get when we are socially rejected (being ignored at a party or passed over when picking teams) is real. When researchers measured brain responses to social stress they found a pattern similar to what occurs in the brain when our body experiences physical pain. Specifically, "the area affected is the anterior cingulate cortex, a part of the brain known to be involved in the emotional response to pain" (Fox). The doctor who conducted the study, Matt Lieberman, a social psychologist at the University of California, Los Angeles, said, "It makes sense for humans to be programmed this way. Social interaction is important to survival." (Nishina, Juvonen, & Witkow, 2005)

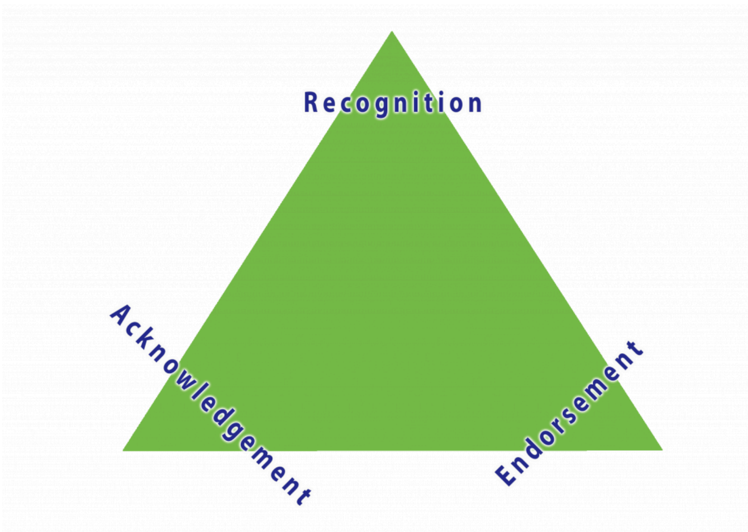
Confirming and Disconfirming Climates

Positive and negative climates can be understood by looking at confirming and disconfirming messages. We experience *positive climates* when we receive messages that demonstrate our value and worth from those with whom we have a relationship. Conversely, we experience *negative climates* when we receive messages that suggest we are devalued and unimportant. Obviously, most of us like to be in positive climates because they foster emotional safety as well as personal and relational growth. However, it is likely that your relationships fall somewhere between the two extremes. Let's start by looking at three types of confirming messages that create positive climates.

- **Recognition Messages**: Recognition *messages either confirm or deny another person's existence*. For example, if a friend enters your home and you smile, hug him, and say, "I'm so glad to see you" you are confirming his existence. If you say "good morning" to a colleague and she ignores you by walking out of the room without saying anything, she is creating a disconfirming climate by not recognizing you as a unique individual.

- **Acknowledgment Messages**: Acknowledgement messages go beyond recognizing another's existence by *confirming what they say or how they feel*. Nodding our head while listening, or laughing appropriately at a funny story, are nonverbal acknowledgment messages. When a friend tells you she had a really bad day at work and you respond with, "Yeah, that does sound hard, do you want to go somewhere quiet and talk?", you are acknowledging and responding to her feelings. In contrast, if you were to respond to your friend's frustrations with a comment like, "That's nothing. Listen to what happened to me today," you would be ignoring her experience and presenting yours as more important.

- **Endorsement Messages**: Endorsement messages go one step further by *recognizing a person's feelings as valid*. Suppose a friend comes to you upset after a fight with his girlfriend. If you respond with, "Yeah, I can see why you would be upset" you are endorsing his right to feel upset. However, if you said, "Get over it. At least you have a girlfriend" you would be sending messages that deny his right to feel frustrated in that moment. While it is difficult to see people we care about in emotional pain, people are responsible for their own emotions. When we let people own their emotions and do not tell them how to feel, we are creating supportive climates that provide a safe environment for them to work through their problems.



Unfortunately, sometimes when we are interacting with others, disconfirming messages are used. These messages imply, “You don’t exist. You are not valued.” There are seven types of disconfirming messages:

- **Impervious response** fails to acknowledge another person’s communication attempt through either verbal or nonverbal channels. Failure to return phone calls, emails, and letters are examples.
- In an **interrupting response**, one person starts to speak before the other person is finished.

- **Irrelevant responses** are comments completely unrelated to what the other person was just talking about. They indicate that the listener wasn't really listening at all, and therefore doesn't value with the speaker had to say. In each of these three types of responses, the speaker is not acknowledged.
- In a **tangential response**, the speaker is acknowledged, but with a comment that is used to steer the conversation in a different direction.
- In an **impersonal response**, the speaker offers a monologue of impersonal, intellectualized, and generalized statements that trivializes the other's comments (e.g., what doesn't kill you makes you stronger).
- **Ambiguous responses** are messages with multiple meanings, and these meanings are highly abstract, or are a private joke to the speaker alone.
- I**ncongruous responses** communicate two messages that seem to conflict along the verbal and nonverbal channels. The verbal channel demonstrates support, while the nonverbal channel is disconfirming. An example might be complimenting someone's cooking, while nonverbally indicating you are choking.

Key Takeaways

1. Communication climate influences our interactions.
2. Confirming messages can create positive communication cliamtes.
3. Disconfirming messages can create negative communication climates.

References and Licensing

7.2 The Dark Side of Relationships

Learning Objectives

1. Define relationship transgressions.
2. Explain how lying affects relationships.
3. Contrast types of aggression.

In the course of a given day, it is likely that we will encounter the light and dark sides of interpersonal relationships. So what constitutes the dark side of relationships? There are two dimensions of the dark side of relationships: one is the degree to which something is deemed acceptable or not by society; the other includes the degree to which something functions productively to improve a relationship or not (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007). These dimensions become more complicated when we realize that there can be overlap between them, meaning that it may not always be easy to identify something as exclusively light or dark.

Some communication patterns may be viewed as appropriate by society but still serve a relationally destructive function. Our society generally presumes that increased understanding of a relationship and relational partner would benefit the relationship. However, numerous research studies have found that increased understanding of a relationship and relational partner may be negative. In fact, by avoiding discussing certain topics that might cause conflict, some couples create and sustain positive illusions about their relationship that may cover up a darker reality. Despite this, the couple may report that they are very satisfied with their relationship. In this case, the old saying “ignorance is bliss” seems appropriate. Likewise, communication that is presumed inappropriate by society may be productive for a given relationship (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007). For example, our society ascribes to an ideology of openness that promotes honesty. However, as we will discuss more next, honesty may not always be the best policy. Lies intended to protect a relational partner (called altruistic lies) may net an overall positive result improving the functioning of a relationship.

Relational Transgression

Relational transgressions occur when people violate implicit or explicit relational rules. These transgressions include a wide variety of behaviors. Scholars tend to delineate relational transgressions into three categories or approaches. The first approach focuses on the aspect of certain behaviors as a violation of relational norms and rules. The second approach focuses on the interpretive consequences of certain behaviors, particularly the degree to which they hurt the victim, imply disregard for the victim, and imply disregard for the relationship. The third and final approach focuses more specifically on behaviors that constitute infidelity (a common form of relational transgression).

Rule violations

Rule violations are events, actions, and behaviors that violate an implicit or explicit relationship norm or rule. Explicit rules tend to be relationship specific, such as those prompted by the bad habits of a partner (e.g., excessive drinking or drug abuse), or those that emerge from attempts to manage conflict (e.g., rules that prohibit spending time with a former spouse or talking about a former girlfriend or boyfriend). Implicit rules tend to be those that are accepted as cultural standards for proper relationship conduct (e.g., monogamy and secrets kept private). The focus on relational transgressions as rule violations presents an opportunity to examine a wide range of behaviors across a variety of relationship types. This method facilitates analysis of transgressions from a rules perspective. In a study of college students' relational transgressions, the following nine categories emerged consistently.

1. *Inappropriate interaction*: Instances in which a partner performs badly during an interaction, typically a conflict episode.
2. *Lack of sensitivity:* Instances in which a partner exhibits

thoughtless, disrespectful, or inconsiderate behavior. Offender demonstrates a lack of concern or emotional responsiveness when expected and appropriate.

3. *Extrarelational involvement*: Sexual or emotional involvement with persons other than the offended party. Offender does not confound involvement with deception.
4. *Relational threat confounded by deception*: Instances in which a partner participates in sexual or emotional involvement with persons other than the offended party and then uses deception to conceal the involvement.
5. *Disregard for primary relationship*: Actions that indicate the transgressor does not privilege the primary relationship; chooses other people or activities over partner or changes plans.
6. *Abrupt termination:* Actions that terminate a relationship with no warning and no explanation.
7. *Broken promises and rule violations*: Occasions during which a partner fails to keep a promise, changes plans with no warning or explanation, or violates a rule that the offended person assumes was binding.
8. *Deception, secrets, privacy*: Instances in which a partner lied, kept important information a secret, failed to keep sensitive information private, or violated privacy boundaries.
9. *Abuse:* Verbal or physical threats.

Cameron, Ross, and Holmes (2002) identified 10 categories of common relational negative behavior that constitute relational transgressions as rule violations:

1. Broken promises
2. Overreaction to the victim’s behavior
3. Inconsiderate behavior
4. Violating the victim’s desired level of intimacy
5. Neglecting the victim
6. Threat of infidelity

7. Infidelity
8. Verbal aggression toward the victim
9. Unwarranted disagreement
10. Violent behavior toward the victim

Infidelity

Infidelity is widely recognized as one of the most hurtful relational transgressions. Around 30% to 40% of dating relationships are marked by at least one incident of sexual infidelity. It is typically among the most difficult transgressions to forgive. There are typically four methods of discovery:

1. finding out from a third party;
2. witnessing the infidelity firsthand, such as walking in on your partner with someone else;
3. having the partner admit to infidelity after you question her or him; and
4. having the partner tell you on his or her own.

Partners who found out through a third party or by witnessing the infidelity firsthand were the least likely to forgive. Partners who confessed on their own were the most likely to be forgiven.

Sexual vs. emotional infidelity

Sexual infidelity refers to sexual activity with someone other than a person's partner. Sexual infidelity can span a wide range of behavior and thoughts, including sexual intercourse, heavy petting, passionate kissing, sexual fantasies, and sexual attraction. It can involve a sustained relationship, a one-night stand, or a prostitute. Most people in the United States openly disapprove of sexual infidelity, but research indicates that infidelity is common. Men are typically more likely than women to engage in a sexual affair, regardless if they are married or in a dating relationship.

Emotional infidelity refers to emotional involvement with another person, which leads one's partner to channel emotional resources to someone else. Emotional infidelity can involve strong feelings of love and intimacy, nonsexual fantasies of falling in love, romantic attraction, or the desire to spend time with another individual. Emotional infidelity may involve a coworker, Internet partner, face-to-face communication, or a long distance phone call. Emotional infidelity is likely related to dissatisfaction with the communication and social support an individual is receiving in his or her current relationship.

Each type of infidelity evokes different responses. Sexual infidelity is more likely to result in hostile, shocked, repulsed, humiliated, homicidal, or suicidal feelings. Emotional infidelity is more likely to evoke feelings of being undesirable, insecure, depressed, or abandoned. When both types of infidelity are present in a relationship, couples are more likely to break up than when only one type of infidelity is involved.

Internet infidelity

Recent research provides support for conceptualizing infidelity on a continuum ranging in severity from superficial/informal behavior to involving or goal-directed behavior. This perspective accounts for the varying degrees of behavior (e.g., sexual, emotional) on the Internet. A number of acts not involving direct, one-to-one communication with another person (e.g. posting a personal ad or looking at pornography) can be perceived as forms of infidelity. Thus, communication with another live person is not necessary for infidelity to occur. Accordingly, Internet infidelity is defined by Docan-Morgan and Docan (2007)as follows: "An act or actions engaged via the internet by one person with a committed relationship, where such an act occurs outside the primary relationship, and constitutes a breach of trust and/or violation of agreed-upon norms (overt or covert) by one or both individuals in that relationship with regard to relational exclusivity, and is perceived as having a particular degree of severity by one or both partners" (Docan-Morgan, & Docan, 2007).

Jealousy

Characteristics of jealousy

Jealousy is the result of a relational transgression, such as a partner having a sexual or emotional affair. Jealousy can also be seen as a transgression in its own right when a partner's suspicions are unfounded. Thus, jealousy is an important component of relational transgressions. There are several types of jealousy. Romantic jealousy occurs when a partner is concerned that a potential rival might interfere with his or her existing romantic relationship. Sexual jealousy is a specific form of romantic jealousy where an individual worries that a rival is having or wants to have sex with his or her partner.

Other forms of jealousy include:

- **Friend jealousy** – feeling threatened by a partner's relationships with friends.
- **Family jealousy** – feeling threatened by a partner's relationships with family members.
- **Activity jealousy** – perceiving that a partner's activities, such as work, hobbies, or school, are interfering with one's relationship.
- **Power jealousy** – perceiving that one's influence over a partner is being lost to others.

- **Intimacy jealousy** – believing that one's partner in engaging in more intimate communication, such as disclosure and advice seeking, with someone else.

Jealousy is different from envy and rivalry. Envy occurs when people want something valuable that someone else has. Rivalry occurs when two people are competing for something that neither person has.

Experiencing romantic jealousy

Individuals who are experiencing jealous thoughts typically make primary and secondary cognitive appraisals about their particular situation. Primary appraisals involve general evaluations about the existence and quality of a rival relationship. Secondary appraisals involve more specific evaluations about the jealous situation, including possible causes of the jealousy and potential outcomes to the situation. There are four common types of secondary appraisals:

1. jealous people assess motives;
2. jealous people compare themselves to their rivals;
3. they evaluate their potential alternatives;
4. finally, jealous people assess their potential loss.

Jealous individuals make appraisals to develop coping strategies and assess potential outcomes.

Jealous individuals normally experience combinations of emotions, in addition to the aforementioned cognitive appraisals. The most common emotions associated with jealousy are fear and anger; people are fearful of losing their relationship and they are often angry at their partner or rival. Other common negative emotions associated with jealousy are sadness, guilt, hurt, and envy. Sometimes, however, jealousy leads to positive emotions, including increased passion, love, and appreciation.

Relational partners sometimes intentionally induce jealousy in their relationship. There are typically two types of goals for jealousy induction. Relational rewards reflect the desire to improve the relationship, increase self-esteem, and increase relational rewards. The second type of goal, relational revenge, reflects the desire to punish one's partner, the need for revenge, and the desire to control one's partner. The tactic of inducing jealousy may produce unintended conseuqences, as jealousy often leads to other relational transgressions including violence.

Communicative responses to jealousy

Jealousy can involve a wide range of communicative responses. These responses are based upon the individuals' goals and emotions. The most common of these responses are negative affect expression, integrative communication, and distributive communication. When people want to maintain their relationship, they use integrative communication and compensatory restoration. People who are fearful of losing their relationships typically use compensatory restoration.

Conversely, people who are concerned with maintaining their self-esteem allege that they deny jealous feelings. When individuals are motivated to reduce uncertainty about their partner, they use integrative communication, surveillance, and rival contacts to seek additional information. Communicative responses to jealousy may help reduce uncertainty and restore self-esteem, but they may actually increase uncertainty and negatively impact relationships and self-esteem in some instances. The type of communicative response used is critical.

For example, avoidance/denial may be used to protect one's self-esteem, but it may also result in increased uncertainty and relational dissatisfaction, if the jealous partner is left with lingering suspicions. Similarly, compensatory restoration may improve the relationship in some instances, but it may also communicate low self-esteem and desperation by the jealous individual. Distributive communication, which includes behaviors such as yelling and confrontation, may serve to vent negative emotions and retaliate by making the partner feel bad. This may exacerbate an already negative situation and make reconciliation less likely.[11]

Jealousy and relational satisfaction

Jealousy is generally considered to be a relationship dysfunction, though it may have some positive relational properties. These positive properties can be attained through the development of one's ability to manage jealousy in a productive way so that the jealous individual shows care and concern without seeming overly fearful, aggressive, or possessive. Negative affect expression can be effective if used in conjunction with integrative communication. Compensatory restoration can be effective, but when used in excess, too much can make an individual seem desperate and too eager to please, which can have detrimental effects on the relationships.

Rumination

From the aspect of jealousy, rumination reflects uncomfortable mulling about the security of a relationship. Rumination refers to thoughts that are conscious, recurring, and not demanded by the individual's current environment. Ruminative thoughts occur repetitively and are difficult to eliminate. In the context of relational threats, rumination can be described as obsessive worry about the security of the current relationship. Individuals who ruminate are very likely to respond to jealousy differently from individuals who do not ruminate. Rumination is positively associated with several communicative responses to jealousy (e.g. compensatory restoration, negative affect expression, showing signs of possession, and derogation of competitors) that attempt to strengthen a relationship. Rumination is also associated with responses that are counterproductive. Despite efforts to restore relational intimacy, rumination sustains uncertainty, which thereby forms a cycle where rumination is sustained. Rumination intensifies over time and serves as a constant reminder of the threat to the relationship, resulting in increased negative affect. This negative affect is associated with destructive responses to jealousy including violent communication and violence towards objects. Finally, jealous rumination is associated with relational distress and counterproductive responses to jealousy.

Sex differences in jealous emotions and communication

Women generally experience more hurt, sadness, anxiety, and confusion than men, perhaps because they often blame themselves for the jealous situation. Conversely, men have been found to deny jealous feelings and focus on increasing their self-esteem. Generally speaking, women tend to be more focused on the relationship, while men tend to be more focused on individual concerns. In communicative responses, women tend to use integrative communication, express negative affect, enhance their appearance, and use counterjealousy induction more often than jealous men. Jealous men more often contact the rival, restrict the partner's access to potential rivals, and give gifts and spend money on the partner. Jealous men also engage in dangerous behaviors, such as getting drunk and engaging in promiscuous sex with others. Analysis from an evolutionary perspective would suggest that men focus on competing for mates and displaying resources (e.g., material goods to suggest financial security), while women focus on creating and enhancing social bonds and showcasing their beauty.

Deception

Deception is a major relational transgression that often leads to feelings of betrayal and distrust between relational partners. Deception violates relational rules and is considered to be a negative violation of expectations. Most people expect friends, relational partners, and even strangers to be truthful most of the time. If people expected most conversations to be untruthful, talking and communicating with others would simply be unproductive and too difficult. On a given day, it is likely that most human beings will either deceive or be deceived by another person. A significant amount of deception occurs between romantic and relational partners.

It's important to note that deception doesn't always constitute a "dark side" of relationships. Although many people have a negative connotation of lying, we have all lied or concealed information in order to protect the feelings of someone else. One research study found that only 27 percent of the participants agreed that a successful relationship must include complete honesty, which shows there is an understanding that lying is a communicative reality in all relationships (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007). Given this reality, it is important to understand the types of lies we tell and the motivations for and consequences of lying.

We tend to lie more during the initiating phase of a relationship (Knapp, 2006). At this time, people may lie about their personality, past relationships, income, or skill sets as they engage in impression management and try to project themselves as likable and competent. For example, while on a first date or meeting new friends, a person may lie and say they recently won an award at work. People sometimes rationalize these lies by exaggerating something that actually happened. So perhaps this person did get recognized at work, but it wasn't actually an award. Lying may be more frequent at this stage, too, because the two people don't know each other, meaning it's unlikely the other person would have any information that would contradict the statement or discover the lie. Aside from lying to make ourselves look better, we may also lie to make someone else feel better. Although trustworthiness and honesty have been listed by survey respondents as the most desired traits in a dating partner, total honesty in some situations could harm a relationship (Knapp, 2006). *Altruistic lies* are lies told to build the self-esteem of our relational partner, communicate loyalty, or bend the truth to spare someone from hurtful information. Part of altruistic lying is telling people what they want to hear. For example, you might tell a friend that their painting is really pretty when you don't actually see the merit of it, or tell your mom you enjoyed her meatloaf when you really didn't. These other-oriented lies may help maintain a smooth relationship, but they could also become so prevalent that the receiver of the lies develops a skewed self-concept and is later hurt. If your friend goes to art school only to be heavily critiqued, did your altruistic lie contribute to that?

Some lies are meant to protect someone or make someone feel better.

Pamela jackson – crossed fingers – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

As we grow closer to someone, we lie less frequently, and the way we go about lying also changes. In fact, it becomes more common to conceal information than to verbally deceive someone outright. We could conceal information by avoiding communication about subjects that could lead to exposure to the lie. When we are asked a direct question that could expose a lie, we may respond equivocally, meaning we don't really answer a question (Knapp, 2006). When we do engage in direct lying in our close relationships, there may be the need to tell supplemental lies to maintain the original lie. So what happens when we suspect or find out that someone is lying?

Types

Deception includes several types of communications or omissions that serve to distort or omit the complete truth. Deception itself is intentionally managing verbal and/or nonverbal messages so that the message receiver will believe in a way that the message sender knows is false. Intent is critical with regard to deception. Intent differentiates between deception and an honest mistake. The Interpersonal Deception Theory explores the interrelation between communicative context and sender and receiver cognitions and behaviors in deceptive exchanges.

Five primary forms of deception consist of the following:

- **lies**: making up information or giving information that is the opposite or very different from the truth.
- **equivocations**: making an indirect, ambiguous, or contradictory statement.
- **concealments**: omitting information that is important or relevant to the given context, or engaging in behavior that helps hide relevant information.
- **exaggeration**: overstatement or stretching the truth to a degree.
- **understatement**: minimization or downplaying aspects of the

truth.

Motives

There are three primary motivations for deceptions in close relationships.

- **Partner-focused motives**: using deception to avoid hurting the partner, helping the partner to enhance or maintain his or her self-esteem, avoid worrying the partner, and protecting the partner's relationship with a third party. Partner-motivated deception can sometimes be viewed as socially polite and relationally beneficial.
- **Self-focused motives**: using deception to enhance or protect their self-image, wanting to shield themselves from anger, embarrassment, or criticism. Self-focused deception is generally perceived as a more serious transgression than partner-focused deception because the deceiver is acting for selfish reasons rather than for the good of the relationship.
- **Relationship-focused motives**: using deception to limit relationship harm by avoiding conflict or relational trauma. Relationally motivated deception can be beneficial to a relationship, and other times it can be harmful by further complicating matters.[2]

Detection

Deception detection between relational partners is extremely difficult unless a partner tells a blatant or obvious lie or contradicts something the other partner knows to be true. While it is difficult to deceive a partner over a long period of time, deception often occurs in day-to-day conversations between relational partners. Detecting deception is difficult because there are no known completely reliable indicators of deception. Deception, however, places a significant cognitive load on the deceiver. He or she must recall previous statements so that his or her story remains consistent and believable. As a result, deceivers often leak important information both verbally and nonverbally.

Deception and its detection are a complex, fluid, and cognitive process that is based on the context of the message exchange. The Interpersonal Deception Theory posits that interpersonal deception is a dynamic, iterative process of mutual influence between a sender, who manipulates information to depart from the truth, and a receiver, who attempts to establish the validity of the message. A deceiver's actions are interrelated to the message receiver's actions. It is during this exchange that the deceiver will reveal verbal and nonverbal information about deceit.[14] Some research has found that there are some cues that may be correlated with deceptive communication, but scholars frequently disagree about the effectiveness of many of these cues to serve as reliable indicators. Noted deception scholar Aldert Vrij even states that there is no nonverbal behavior that is uniquely associated with deception. As previously stated, a specific behavioral indicator of deception does not exist. There are, however, some nonverbal behaviors that have been found to be correlated with deception. Vrij found that examining a "cluster" of these cues was a significantly more reliable indicator of deception than examining a single cue.

Truth bias

The truth bias significantly impairs the ability of relational partners to detect deception. In terms of deception, a truth bias reflects a tendency to judge more messages as truths than lies, independent of their actual veracity.[16] When judging message veracity, the truth bias contributes to an overestimate of the actual number of truths relative to the base rate of actual truths. The truth bias is especially strong within close relationships. People are highly inclined to trust the communications of others and are unlikely to question the relational partner unless faced with a major deviation of behavior that forces a reevaluation. When attempting to detect deceit from a familiar person or relational partner, a large amount of information about the partner is brought to mind. This information essentially overwhelms the receiver's cognitive ability to detect and process any cues to deception. It is somewhat easier to detect deception in strangers, when less information about that person is brought to mind.

Aggression

Relational Aggression

Relational aggression is defined as behaviors that harm others. Harm is created through damaging social relationships or feelings of acceptance. Research on relational aggression indicates that it involves both confrontational and nonconfrontational behaviors. Specific behaviors associated with *confrontation*, or direct behavior, include name-calling, cruel teasing, ridicule, and verbal rejection directed at the target. N*onconfrontational* or indirect behaviors include spreading rumors, gossiping, and social manipulation. Adolescents use indirect aggression more than direct aggression to harm relationships.

Relationally Aggressive Categories

When researching 11 to 13-year-olds, five categories of relationally aggressive behaviors were identified. The categories are labeled inconsistent friendships, rumors/gossip, excluding/ditching friends, social intimidation, and notes/technological aggression. Additional research identified seven types of relationally aggressive behaviors among high school girls. Based on open-ended descriptions from high school girls, the following categories of relational aggression were found: physical threat/physical attack, rejection, humiliation, betrayal, personal attack, boy manipulation, and relational depreciation. In addition to the categories of relationship aggression, it is essential to note that gossiping and spreading rumors were the most common forms of relational aggression across age groups.

Verbal Aggression

Verbal aggression is defined as communication that attacks an individual's self-concept intending to create psychological pain. If you have ever had an argument and been called a name or been put down, then you have been the target of verbal aggression. Verbal aggression is considered a destructive form of communication. Because verbal aggression is regarded as a negative form of communication, researchers have worked to determine characteristics that may increase the likelihood of individuals behaving in an aggressive manner. Researchers found that six dimensions of self-esteem (defensive self-enhancement, moral self-approval, lovability, likability, self-control, and identity integration) were significantly and negatively related to trait verbal aggressiveness. History of familial verbal aggression was positively associated with the perceived acceptability of verbal aggression against a romantic partner, and this association was stronger for individuals with higher behavioral inhibition system scores. Individuals with high behavioral inhibition are more likely to be anxious and react nervously when facing punishment. In other words, people who have been exposed to verbal aggression are more likely to find it acceptable to engage in verbal aggression against a relational partner, especially when the individual also scores high in behavioral inhibition. Also, individuals who score high in behavioral inhibition are more likely to find verbal aggression acceptable regardless of whether they have been exposed to verbal aggression in the past.

Perceptions of Verbal Aggression

If your parents/guardians ever told you that it wasn't what you said, it was the way you said it, then they were offering you sage advice. Research shows that when engaged in interpersonal disputes, smaller amounts of verbal aggression were perceived when the affirming communicator style (relaxed, friendly, and attentive) was used. Thus the communicator's style of communication impacted the perception of the message. Table 14.2.1 provides a list of the ten most common examples of verbally aggressive messages (McGuire, McHale, & Updegraff, 1996).

Table 14.2.1 Verbally Aggressive Messages

Type of Message	Example
Character Attacks	You're a lying jerk!
Competence Attacks	You're too stupid to manage our finances.
Background Attacks	You don't even have a college degree!
Physical Appearance	You are as fat as a pig!
Maledictions	I wish you were dead.
Teasing	Your hair color makes you look like a clown.
Ridicule	Your nose looks like a beak.
Threats	I'll leave you and you won't have a dime to your name.
Swearing	Go to _____!
Nonverbal Emblems	shaking fists, "flipping off"

Bullying

Bullying is a form of communication in which an aggressive individual targets an individual who is perceived to be weaker. *Bullying is* a form of aggressive behavior in which a person of greater power attempts to inflict harm or discomfort on individuals. This definition also indicates that the behavior is repeated over time (Stopcker & McHale, 1992). For example, a child might call his friend an idiot on the playground one day. A single incident of name-calling would not be considered bullying, but if it happened day after day, then the name-calling would be considered bullying. You may have been bullied or known someone who was bullied. It is also possible that you bullied someone. Bullies use their authority, size, or power to create fear in others. Bullying is known to have negative consequences, such as dropping out of school. It was found that the actions of bullies leave their victims feeling helpless, anxious, and depressed. Other researchers report three types of bullying: physical, verbal, and relational (Padilla-Walker, Harper, & Jensen, A. C. 2010).

Physical Bullying

Physical bullying involves hitting, kicking, pulling hair, strapping a female's bra strap or giving a "wedgie." Witnesses easily observe this type of bully. You may recall being the victim of these behaviors, engaging in these behaviors, or watching others engage in these behaviors. Physical bullying can be prevented by observers, such as teachers or even peers. There are several Public Service Campaigns directed toward bystanders to let the bystander know that they can help prevent or stop bullying. However, bullies may corner their victims in a more private setting, knowing that the weaker individual will not be able to defend themselves.

Relational Bullying

The second type of bullying is indirect or *relational bully*. This form of bullying is the manipulation of social relationships to inflict hurt upon another individual. This type of bullying includes either withholding friendship or excluding. Relational bullying often increases as children age because physical bullying decreases. Relational bullying is particularly problematic because it is very painful for victims, but cannot be readily observed. One might wonder what a teacher or parent/guardian might do when two friends suddenly begin to exclude a third friend. The rejection is so painful, but it seems nearly impossible to require adolescents to continue liking and including the rejected child. An interesting finding in relation to this type of bullying is that females are more likely to engage in this form of bullying (Sherman, Lansford,& Volling, 2006).

Verbal Bullying

The third type of bullying is *verbal bullying* and includes threats, degrading comments, teasing, name-calling, putdown, or sarcastic comments (Derkman, 2011). This form of bullying is easily observed as well and can be prevented by authorities and peers. The effects of this form of bullying are similar to the impact of physical and relational bullying.

The negative consequences of childhood bullying have driven communication scholars to develop educational tools to provide to teachers and other authority figures. Researchers developed a model to assist teachers in discerning playful, prosocial teasing from destructive bullying (Buist, & Vermande, 2014). The Teasing Totter Model outlines behaviors that range from prosocial teasing to bullying and offers recommendations for responding to each. Teasing in a prosocial manner is usually done among friends, laughter is involved and even affection. Bullying, on the other hand, is a repeated negative behavior in which the victim is visibly distressed. There is a clear power difference in size, age, or ability.

Cyberbullying

The inherent ease of using the Internet and communicating via the Internet has created an excellent and convenient venue for bullying. *Cyberbullying is* intentional harm inflicted through the medium of electronics that is repeated over time (Derkman, 2011). Cyberbullying affects victims academically and socially with 20% of victims reporting Internet avoidance (Buist, & Vermande, 2014) When using electronic communication technologies, young people are exposed to interpersonal violence, social aggression, harassment, and mistreatment. Cyberbullying includes behaviors such as flaming, which involves posting provocative or abusive posts, and outing where personal information is posted (Myers, et al., 1999). Cyberbullying is so prevalent that social media such as Facebook have policies to help users avoid this phenomenon. Consider how often you engage with your peers through social media versus your counterparts who were teenagers/young adults in the 1980s. Opportunities for communicating with peers were limited to FtF or via landline phones. Thus opportunities for bullying could be confined to school or landline phones such that bullying was limited to eight hour school days and phone calls that could be ended immediately upon becoming uncomfortable. Now, there is no end to when bullying can take place. Cyberbullying can take place 24/7, and the only way to avoid it is to cut off a major from of staying connected with one's world via cell phone or Internet. Researchers are just now beginning to understand the impact of cyberbullying, and some speculate that cyberbullying is worse than traditional bullying, but research shows mixed results on this assertion.

"Getting Competent"

Handling Communicative Aggression at Work

Workplace bullying is a form of communicative aggression that occurs between coworkers as one employee (the bully) attempts to degrade, intimidate, or humiliate another employee (the target), and research shows that one in three adults has experienced workplace bullying (Petrecca, 2010). In fact, there is an organization called Civility Partners, LLC devoted to ending workplace bullying—you can visit their website at http://www.noworkplacebullies.com/home. This type of behavior has psychological and emotional consequences, but it also has the potential to damage a company's reputation and finances. While there are often mechanisms in place to help an employee deal with harassment—reporting to Human Resources for example—the situation may be trickier if the bully is your boss. In this case, many employees may be afraid to complain for fear of retaliation like getting fired, and transferring to another part of the company or getting another job altogether is a less viable option in a struggling economy. Apply the communication concepts you've learned so far to address the following questions.

1. How can you distinguish between a boss who is demanding or a perfectionist and a boss who is a bully?
2. If you were being bullied by someone at work, what would you do?

Key Takeaways

- The dark side of relationships exists in relation to the light side and includes actions that are deemed unacceptable by society at large and actions that are unproductive for those in the relationship.
- Lying does not always constitute a dark side of relationships, as altruistic lies may do more good than harm. However, the closer a relationship, the more potential there is for lying to have negative effects.
- Relationship aggression occurs in different forms and contexts.

Exercises

1. Describe a situation in which lying affected one of your interpersonal relationships. What was the purpose of the lie and how did the lie affect the relationship?
2. How do you think technology has affected extradyadic romantic activity?
3. Getting integrated: In what ways might the "dark side of relationships" manifest in your personal relationships in academic contexts, professional contexts, and civic contexts?
4. Review the types of secret tests. For each type, provide an example from your own life in which you have engaged in the secret test or observed a friend doing so. For each example, state whether you believe the secret test was helpful or harmful and why.
5. Create your definition of emotional infidelity. Ask three friends to come up with their definition of emotional infidelity. Compare and contrast the four definitions.
6. After reading the section on Internet infidelity and Internet characteristics, find your example in the popular media that relates to one of the characteristics of the Internet that seems to facilitate infidelity. For example, you might choose the characteristic "speed." Find an article in the popular media in which speed played a role in an individual's ability to "cheat" in the virtual environment.
7. Working in a group, create an example of each type of hurtful message from your own life that you have

experienced or witnessed. What was the reaction? Label the reaction according to Vangelisti and Crumley's Reaction Types.

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7.3 Approaching Interpersonal Conflict

Learning Objectives

1. Define interpersonal conflict.
2. Compare and contrast the five styles of interpersonal conflict management.
3. Explain how perception and culture influence interpersonal conflict.
4. List strategies for effectively managing conflict.

Conflict and Interpersonal Communication

Who do you have the most conflict with right now? Your answer to this question probably depends on the various contexts in your life. If you still live at home with a parent or parents, you may have daily conflicts with your family as you try to balance your autonomy, or desire for independence, with the practicalities of living under your family's roof. If you've recently moved away to go to college, you may be negotiating roommate conflicts as you adjust to living with someone you may not know at all. You probably also have experiences managing conflict in romantic relationships and in the workplace. So think back and ask yourself, "How well do I handle conflict?" As with all areas of communication, we can improve if we have the background knowledge to identify relevant communication phenomena and the motivation to reflect on and enhance our communication skills.

Interpersonal conflict occurs in interactions where there are real or perceived incompatible goals, scarce resources, or opposing viewpoints. Interpersonal conflict may be expressed verbally or nonverbally along a continuum ranging from a nearly imperceptible cold shoulder to a very obvious blowout.

Conflict is an inevitable part of close relationships and can take a negative emotional toll. It takes effort to ignore someone or be passive-aggressive, and the anger or guilt we may feel after blowing up at someone are valid negative feelings. However, conflict isn't always negative or unproductive. In fact, numerous research studies have shown that the quantity of conflict in a relationship is not as important as how the conflict is handled (Markman et al., 1993). Additionally, when conflict is well managed, it has the potential to lead to more rewarding and satisfactory relationships (Canary & Messman, 2000).

Improving your competence in dealing with conflict can yield positive effects in the real world. Since conflict is present in our personal and professional lives, the ability to manage conflict and negotiate desirable outcomes can help us be more successful at both. Whether you and your partner are trying to decide what brand of flat-screen television to buy or discussing the upcoming political election with your mother, the potential for conflict is present. In professional settings, the ability to engage in conflict management, sometimes called conflict resolution, is a necessary and valued skill. However, many professionals do not receive training in conflict management even though they are expected to do it as part of their job (Gates, 2006). A lack of training and a lack of competence could be a recipe for disaster, which is illustrated in an episode of *The Office* titled "Conflict Resolution." In the episode, Toby, the human resources officer, encourages office employees to submit anonymous complaints about their coworkers. Although Toby doesn't attempt to resolve the conflicts, the employees feel like they are being heard. When Michael, the manager, finds out there is unresolved conflict, he makes the anonymous complaints public in an attempt to encourage resolution, which backfires, creating more conflict within the office. As usual, Michael doesn't demonstrate communication competence; however, there are career paths for people who do have an interest in or talent for conflict management. In fact, being a mediator was named one of the best careers for 2011 by *U.S. News and World Report*. Many colleges and universities now offer undergraduate degrees, graduate degrees, or certificates in conflict resolution, such as this one at the University of North Carolina Greensboro: http://conflictstudies.uncg.edu/site. Being able to manage conflict situations can make life more pleasant rather than letting a situation stagnate or escalate. The negative effects of poorly handled conflict could range from an awkward last few weeks of the semester with a college roommate to violence or divorce. However, there is no absolute right or wrong way to handle a conflict. Remember that being a competent communicator doesn't mean that you follow a set of absolute rules. Rather, a competent communicator assesses multiple contexts and applies or adapts communication tools and skills to fit the dynamic situation.

Conflict Management Styles

Would you describe yourself as someone who prefers to avoid conflict? Do you like to get your way? Are you good at working with someone to reach a solution that is mutually beneficial? Odds are that you have been in situations where you could answer yes to each of these questions, which underscores the important role context plays in conflict and conflict management styles in particular. The way we view and deal with conflict is learned and contextual. Is the way you handle conflicts similar to the way your parents handle conflict? If you're of a certain age, you are likely predisposed to answer this question with a certain “No!” It wasn’t until my late twenties and early thirties that I began to see how similar I am to my parents, even though I, like many, spent years trying to distinguish myself from them. Research does show that there is intergenerational transmission of traits related to conflict management. As children, we test out different conflict resolution styles we observe in our families with our parents and siblings. Later, as we enter adolescence and begin developing platonic and romantic relationships outside the family, we begin testing what we’ve learned from our parents in other settings. If a child has observed and used negative conflict management styles with siblings or parents, he or she is likely to exhibit those behaviors with non–family members (Reese-Weber & Bartle-Haring, 1998).

There has been much research done on different types of conflict management styles, which are communication strategies that attempt to avoid, address, or resolve a conflict. Keep in mind that we don’t always consciously choose a style. We may instead be caught up in emotion and become reactionary. The strategies for more effectively managing conflict that will be discussed later may allow you to slow down the reaction process, become more aware of it, and intervene in the process to improve your communication. A powerful tool to mitigate conflict is information exchange. Asking for more information before you react to a conflict-triggering event is a good way to add a buffer between the trigger and your reaction. Another key element is whether or not a communicator is oriented toward self-centered or other-centered goals. For example, if your goal is to “win” or make the other person “lose,” you show a high concern for self and a low concern for other. If your goal is to facilitate a “win/win” resolution or outcome, you show a high concern for self and other. In general, strategies that facilitate information exchange and include concern for mutual goals will be more successful at managing conflict (Sillars, 1980).

The five strategies for managing conflict we will discuss are competing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising, and collaborating. Each of these conflict styles accounts for the concern we place on self versus other (see Figure 6.1 "Five Styles of Interpersonal Conflict Management").

Figure 6.1 Five Styles of Interpersonal Conflict Management – Source: Adapted from M. Afzalur Rahim, "A Measure of Styles of Handling Interpersonal Conflict," Academy of Management Journal 26, no. 2 (1983): 368–76.

In order to better understand the elements of the five styles of conflict management, we will apply each to the follow scenario. Rosa and D'Shaun have been partners for seventeen years. Rosa is growing frustrated because D'Shaun continues to give money to their teenage daughter, Casey, even though they decided to keep the teen on a fixed allowance to try to teach her more responsibility. While conflicts regarding money and child rearing are very common, we will see the numerous ways that Rosa and D'Shaun could address this problem.

Competing

The competing style indicates a high concern for self and a low concern for other. When we compete, we are striving to "win" the conflict, potentially at the expense or "loss" of the other person.

One way we may gauge our win is by being granted or taking concessions from the other person. For example, if D'Shaun gives Casey extra money behind Rosa's back, he is taking an indirect competitive route resulting in a "win" for him because he got his way. The competing style also involves the use of power, which can be noncoercive or coercive (Sillars, 1980). Noncoercive strategies include requesting and persuading. When requesting, we suggest the conflict partner change a behavior. Requesting doesn't require a high level of information exchange. When we persuade, however, we give our conflict partner reasons to support our request or suggestion, meaning there is more information exchange, which may make persuading more effective than requesting. Rosa could try to persuade D'Shaun to stop giving Casey extra allowance money by bringing up their fixed budget or reminding him that they are saving for a summer vacation. Coercive strategies violate standard guidelines for ethical communication and may include aggressive communication directed at rousing your partner's emotions through insults, profanity, and yelling, or through threats of punishment if you do not get your way. If Rosa is the primary income earner in the family, she could use that power to threaten to take D'Shaun's ATM card away if he continues giving Casey money. In all these scenarios, the "win" that could result is only short-term and can lead to conflict escalation. Interpersonal conflict is rarely isolated, meaning there can be ripple effects that connect the current conflict to previous and future conflicts. D'Shaun's behind-the-scenes money giving or Rosa's confiscation of the ATM card could lead to built-up negative emotions that could further test their relationship.

Competing has been linked to aggression, although the two are not always paired. If assertiveness does not work, there is a chance it could escalate to hostility. There is a pattern of verbal escalation: requests, demands, complaints, angry statements, threats, harassment, and verbal abuse (Johnson & Roloff, 2000). Aggressive communication can become patterned, which can create a volatile and hostile environment. The reality television show *The Bad Girls*

Club is a prime example of a chronically hostile and aggressive environment. If you do a Google video search for clips from the show, you will see yelling, screaming, verbal threats, and some examples of physical violence. The producers of the show choose houseguests who have histories of aggression, and when the "bad girls" are placed in a house together, they fall into typical patterns, which creates dramatic television moments. Obviously, living in this type of volatile environment would create stressors in any relationship, so it's important to monitor the use of competing as a conflict resolution strategy to ensure that it does not lapse into aggression.

The competing style of conflict management is not the same thing as having a competitive personality. Competition in relationships isn't always negative, and people who enjoy engaging in competition may not always do so at the expense of another person's goals. In fact, research has shown that some couples engage in competitive shared activities like sports or games to maintain and enrich their relationship (Dindia & Baxter, 1987). And although we may think that competitiveness is gendered, research has often shown that women are just as competitive as men (Messman & Mikesell, 2000).

Avoiding

The avoiding style of conflict management often indicates a low concern for self and a low concern for other, and no direct communication about the conflict takes place. However, as we will discuss later, in some cultures that emphasize group harmony over individual interests, and even in some situations in the United States, avoiding a conflict can indicate a high level of concern for the other. In general, avoiding doesn't mean that there is no communication about the conflict. Remember, *you cannot not communicate*. Even when we try to avoid conflict, we may intentionally or unintentionally give our feelings away through our verbal and nonverbal communication. Rosa's sarcastic tone as she tells D'Shaun that he's "Soooo good with money!" and his subsequent eye roll both bring the conflict to the surface without specifically addressing it. The avoiding style is either passive or indirect, meaning there is little information exchange, which may make this strategy less effective than others. We may decide to avoid conflict for many different reasons, some of which are better than others. If you view the conflict as having little importance to you, it may be better to ignore it. If the person you're having conflict with will only be working in your office for a week, you may perceive a conflict to be temporary and choose to avoid it and hope that it will solve itself. If you are not emotionally invested in the conflict, you may be able to reframe your perspective and see the situation in a different way, therefore resolving the issue. In all these cases, avoiding doesn't really require an investment of time, emotion, or communication skill, so there is not much at stake to lose.

Avoidance is not always an easy conflict management choice, because sometimes the person we have conflict with isn't a temp in our office or a weekend houseguest. While it may be easy to tolerate a problem when you're not personally invested in it or view it as temporary, when faced with a situation like Rosa and D'Shaun's, avoidance would just make the problem worse. For example, avoidance could first manifest as changing the subject, then progress from avoiding the issue to avoiding the person altogether, to even ending the relationship.

Indirect strategies of hinting and joking also fall under the avoiding style. While these indirect avoidance strategies may lead to a buildup of frustration or even anger, they allow us to vent a little of our built-up steam and may make a conflict situation more bearable. When we hint, we drop clues that we hope our partner will find and piece together to see the problem and hopefully change, thereby solving the problem without any direct communication. In almost all the cases of hinting that I have experienced or heard about, the person dropping the hints overestimates their partner's detective abilities. For example, when Rosa leaves the bank statement on the kitchen table in hopes that D'Shaun will realize how much extra money he is giving Casey, D'Shaun may simply ignore it or even get irritated with Rosa for not putting the statement with all the other mail. We also overestimate our partner's ability to decode the jokes we make about a conflict situation. It is more likely that the receiver of the jokes will think you're genuinely trying to be funny or feel provoked or insulted than realize the conflict situation that you are referencing. So more frustration may develop when the hints and jokes are not decoded, which often leads to a more extreme form of hinting/joking: passive-aggressive behavior.

Passive-aggressive behavior is a way of dealing with conflict in which one person indirectly communicates their negative thoughts or feelings through nonverbal behaviors, such as not completing a task. For example, Rosa may wait a few days to deposit money into the bank so D'Shaun can't withdraw it to give to Casey, or D'Shaun may cancel plans for a romantic dinner because he feels like Rosa is questioning his responsibility with money. Although passive-aggressive behavior can feel rewarding in the moment, it is one of the most unproductive ways to deal with conflict. These behaviors may create additional conflicts and may lead to a cycle of passive-aggressiveness in which the other partner begins to exhibit these behaviors as well, while never actually addressing the conflict that originated the behavior. In most avoidance situations, both parties lose. However, as noted above, avoidance can be the most appropriate strategy in some situations—for example, when the conflict is temporary when the stakes are low or there is little personal investment, or when there is the potential for violence or retaliation.

Accommodating

The accommodating conflict management style indicates a low concern for self and a high concern for other and is often viewed as passive or submissive, in that someone complies with or obliges another without providing personal input. The context for and motivation behind accommodating play an important role in whether or not it is an appropriate strategy. Generally, we accommodate because we are being generous, we are obeying, or we are yielding (Bobot, 2010). If we are being generous, we accommodate because we genuinely want to; if we are obeying, we don't have a choice but to accommodate (perhaps due to the potential for negative consequences or punishment); and if we yield, we may have our own views or goals but give up on them due to fatigue, time constraints, or because a better solution has been offered. Accommodating can be appropriate when there is little chance that our own goals can be achieved when we don't have much to lose by accommodating, when we feel we are wrong, or when advocating for our own needs could negatively affect the relationship (Isenhart & Spangle, 2000). The occasional accommodation can be useful in maintaining a relationship—remember earlier we discussed putting another's needs before your own as a way to achieve relational goals. For example, Rosa may say, "It's OK that you gave Casey some extra money; she did have to spend more on gas this week since the prices went up." However, being a team player can slip into being a pushover, which people generally do not appreciate. If Rosa keeps telling D'Shaun, "It's OK this time," they may find themselves short on spending money at the end of the month. At that point, Rosa and D'Shaun's conflict may escalate as they question each other's motives, or the conflict may spread if they direct their frustration at Casey and blame it on her irresponsibility.

Research has shown that the accommodating style is more likely to occur when there are time restraints and less likely to occur when someone does not want to appear weak (Cai & Fink, 2002). If you're standing outside the movie theatre and two movies are starting, you may say, "Let's just have it your way," so you don't miss the beginning. If you're a new manager at an electronics store and an employee wants to take Sunday off to watch a football game, you may say no to set an example for the other employees. As with avoiding, there are certain cultural influences we will discuss later that make accommodating a more effective strategy.

Compromising

The compromising style shows a moderate concern for self and other and may indicate that there is a low investment in the conflict and/or the relationship. Even though we often hear that the best way to handle a conflict is to compromise, the compromising style isn't a win/win solution; it is a partial win/lose. In essence, when we compromise, we give up some or most of what we want. It's true that the conflict gets resolved temporarily, but lingering thoughts of what you gave up could lead to a future conflict. Compromising may be a good strategy when there are time limitations or when prolonging a conflict may lead to relationship deterioration. Compromise may also be good when both parties have equal power or when other resolution strategies have not worked (Macintosh & Stevens, 2008).

Compromise is sometimes viewed as meeting in the middle. Compro

A negative of compromising is that it may be used as an easy way out of a conflict. The compromising style is most effective when both parties find the solution agreeable. Rosa and D'Shaun could decide that Casey's allowance does need to be increased and could each give ten more dollars a week by committing to taking their lunch to work twice a week instead of eating out. They are both giving up something, and if neither of them have a problem with taking their lunch to work, then the compromise was equitable. If the couple agrees that the twenty extra dollars a week should come out of D'Shaun's golf budget, the compromise isn't as equitable, and D'Shaun, although he agreed to the compromise, may end up with feelings of resentment. Wouldn't it be better to both win?

Collaborating

The collaborating style involves a high degree of concern for self and other and usually indicates investment in the conflict situation and the relationship. Although the collaborating style takes the most work in terms of communication competence, it ultimately leads to a win/win situation in which neither party has to make concessions because a mutually beneficial solution is discovered or created. The obvious advantage is that both parties are satisfied, which could lead to positive problem solving in the future and strengthen the overall relationship. For example, Rosa and D'Shaun may agree that Casey's allowance needs to be increased and may decide to give her twenty more dollars a week in exchange for her babysitting her little brother one night a week. In this case, they didn't make the conflict personal but focused on the situation and came up with a solution that may end up saving them money. The disadvantage is that this style is often time consuming, and only one person may be willing to use this approach while the other person is eager to compete to meet their goals or willing to accommodate.

Here are some tips for collaborating and achieving a win/win outcome (Hargie, 2011):

- Do not view the conflict as a contest you are trying to win.
- Remain flexible and realize there are solutions yet to be discovered.
- Distinguish the people from the problem (don't make it personal).
- Determine what the underlying needs are that are driving the other person's demands (needs can still be met through different demands).
- Identify areas of common ground or shared interests that you can work from to develop solutions.
- Ask questions to allow them to clarify and to help you understand their perspective.
- Listen carefully and provide verbal and nonverbal feedback.

"Getting Competent"

Handling Roommate Conflicts

Whether you have a roommate by choice, by necessity, or through the random selection process of your school's housing office, it's important to be able to get along with the person who shares your living space. While having a roommate offers many benefits such as making a new friend, having someone to experience a new situation like college life with, and having someone to split the cost on your own with, there are also challenges. Some common roommate conflicts involve neatness, noise, having guests, sharing possessions, value conflicts, money conflicts, and personality conflicts (Ball State University, 2001). Read the following scenarios and answer the following questions for each one:

1. Which conflict management style, from the five discussed, would you use in this situation?
2. What are the potential strengths of using this style?
3. What are the potential weaknesses of using this style?

Scenario 1: Neatness. Your college dorm has bunk beds, and your roommate takes a lot of time making his bed (the bottom bunk) each morning. He has told you that he doesn't want anyone sitting on or sleeping in his bed when he is not in the room. While he is away for the weekend, your friend comes to visit and sits on the bottom bunk bed. You tell him what your roommate said, and you try to fix the bed back before he returns to the dorm. When he returns, he notices that his bed has been disturbed and he confronts you about it.

Scenario 2: Noise and having guests. Your roommate has a job waiting tables and gets home around midnight on Thursday nights. She often brings a couple friends from work home with her. They watch television, listen to music, or play video games and talk and laugh. You have an 8 a.m. class on Friday mornings and are usually asleep when she returns. Last Friday, you talked to her and asked her to keep it down in the future. Tonight, their noise has woken you up and you can't get back to sleep.

Scenario 3: Sharing possessions. When you go out to eat, you often bring back leftovers to have for lunch the next day during your short break between classes. You didn't have time to eat breakfast, and you're really excited about having your leftover pizza for lunch until you get home and see your roommate sitting on the couch eating the last slice.

Scenario 4: Money conflicts. Your roommate got mono and missed two weeks of work last month. Since he has a steady job and you have some savings, you cover his portion of the rent and agree that he will pay your portion next month. The next month comes around and he informs you that he only has enough to pay his half.

Scenario 5: Value and personality conflicts. You like to go out to clubs and parties and have friends over, but your roommate is much more of an introvert. You've tried to get her to come out with you or join the party at your place, but she'd rather study. One day she tells you that she wants to break the lease so she can move out early to live with one of her friends. You both signed the lease, so you have to agree or she can't do it. If you break the lease, you automatically lose your portion of the security deposit.

Culture and Conflict

Culture is an important context to consider when studying conflict, and recent research has called into question some of the assumptions of the five conflict management styles discussed so far, which were formulated with a Western bias (Oetzel, Garcia, & Ting-Toomey, 2008). For example, while the avoiding style of conflict has been cast as negative, with a low concern for self and other or as a lose/lose outcome, this research found that participants in the United States, Germany, China, and Japan all viewed avoiding strategies as demonstrating a concern for the other. While there are some generalizations we can make about culture and conflict, it is better to look at more specific patterns of how interpersonal communication and conflict management are related. We can better understand some of the cultural differences in conflict management by further examining the concept of *face*.

What does it mean to "save face?" This saying generally refers to preventing embarrassment or preserving our reputation or image, which is similar to the concept of face in interpersonal and intercultural communication. Our face is the projected self we desire to put into the world, and facework refers to the communicative strategies we employ to project, maintain, or repair our face or maintain, repair, or challenge another's face. Face negotiation theory argues that people in all cultures negotiate face through communication encounters, and that cultural factors influence how we engage in facework, especially in conflict situations (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003). These cultural factors influence whether we are more concerned with self-face or other-face and what types of conflict management strategies we may use. One key cultural influence on face negotiation is the distinction between individualistic and collectivistic cultures.

The distinction between individualistic and collectivistic cultures is an important dimension across which all cultures vary. Individualistic cultures like the United States and most of Europe emphasize individual identity over group identity and encourage competition and self-reliance. Collectivistic cultures like Taiwan, Colombia, China, Japan, Vietnam, and Peru value in-group identity over individual identity and value conformity to social norms of the in-group (Dsilva & Whyte, 1998). However, within the larger cultures, individuals will vary in the degree to which they view themselves as part of a group or as a separate individual, which is called self-construal. Independent self-construal indicates a perception of the self as an individual with unique feelings, thoughts, and motivations. Interdependent self-construal indicates a perception of the self as interrelated with others (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003). Not surprisingly, people from individualistic cultures are more likely to have higher levels of independent self-construal, and people from collectivistic cultures are more likely to have higher levels of interdependent self-construal. Self-construal and individualistic or collectivistic cultural orientations affect how people engage in facework and the conflict management styles they employ.

Self-construal alone does not have a direct effect on conflict style, but it does affect face concerns, with independent self-construal favoring self-face concerns and interdependent self-construal favoring other-face concerns. There are specific facework strategies for different conflict management styles, and these strategies correspond to self-face concerns or other-face concerns.

- **Accommodating.** Giving in (self-face concern).
- **Avoiding.** Pretending conflict does not exist (other-face concern).
- **Competing.** Defending your position, persuading (self-face concern).
- **Collaborating.** Apologizing, having a private discussion, remaining calm (other-face concern) (Oetzel, Garcia, & Ting-Toomey, 2008).

Research done on college students in Germany, Japan, China, and the United States found that those with independent self-construal were more likely to engage in competing, and those with interdependent self-construal were more likely to engage in avoiding or collaborating (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003). And in general, this research found that members of collectivistic cultures were more likely to use the *avoiding* style of conflict management and less likely to use the *integrating* or *competing* styles of conflict management than were members of individualistic cultures. The following examples bring together facework strategies, cultural orientations, and conflict management style: Someone from an individualistic culture may be more likely to engage in competing as a conflict management strategy if they are directly confronted, which may be an attempt to defend their reputation (self-face concern). Someone in a collectivistic culture may be more likely to engage in avoiding or accommodating in order not to embarrass or anger the person confronting them (other-face concern) or out of concern that their reaction could reflect negatively on their family or cultural group (other-face concern). While these distinctions are useful for categorizing large-scale cultural patterns, it is important not to essentialize or arbitrarily group countries together, because there are measurable differences within cultures. For example, expressing one's emotions was seen as demonstrating a low concern for other-face in Japan, but this was not so in China, which shows there is variety between similarly collectivistic cultures. Culture always adds layers of complexity to any communication phenomenon, but experiencing and learning from other cultures also enriches our lives and makes us more competent communicators.

Handling Conflict Better

Conflict is inevitable and it is not inherently negative. A key part of developing interpersonal communication competence involves being able to effectively manage the conflict you will encounter in all your relationships. One key part of handling conflict better is to notice patterns of conflict in specific relationships and to generally have an idea of what causes you to react negatively and what your reactions usually are.

Identifying Conflict Patterns

Much of the research on conflict patterns has been done on couples in romantic relationships, but the concepts and findings are applicable to other relationships. Four common triggers for conflict are criticism, demand, cumulative annoyance, and rejection (Christensen & Jacobson, 2000). We all know from experience that criticism, or comments that evaluate another person's personality, behavior, appearance, or life choices, may lead to conflict. Comments do not have to be meant as criticism to be perceived as such. If Gary comes home from college for the weekend and his mom says, "Looks like you put on a few pounds," she may view this as a statement of fact based on observation. Gary, however, may take the comment personally and respond negatively back to his mom, starting a conflict that will last for the rest of his visit. A simple but useful strategy to manage the trigger of criticism is to follow the old adage "Think before you speak." In many cases, there are alternative ways to phrase things that may be taken less personally, or we may determine that our comment doesn't need to be spoken at all. I've learned that a majority of the thoughts that we have about another person's physical appearance, whether positive or negative, do not need to be verbalized. Ask yourself, "What is my motivation for making this comment?" and "Do I have anything to lose by not making this comment?" If your underlying reasons for asking are valid, perhaps there is another way to phrase your observation. If Gary's mom is worried about his eating habits and health, she could wait until they're eating dinner and ask him how he likes the food choices at school and what he usually eats.

Demands also frequently trigger conflict, especially if the demand is viewed as unfair or irrelevant. It's important to note that demands rephrased as questions may still be or be perceived as demands. Tone of voice and context are important factors here. When you were younger, you may have asked a parent, teacher, or elder for something and heard back "Ask nicely." As with criticism, thinking before you speak and before you respond can help manage demands and minimize conflict episodes. As we discussed earlier, demands are sometimes met with withdrawal rather than a verbal response. If you are doing the demanding, remember a higher level of information exchange may make your demand clearer or more reasonable to the other person. If you are being demanded of, responding calmly and expressing your thoughts and feelings are likely more effective than withdrawing, which may escalate the conflict.

Cumulative annoyance is a building of frustration or anger that occurs over time, eventually resulting in a conflict interaction. For example, your friend shows up late to drive you to class three times in a row. You didn't say anything the previous times, but on the third time you say, "You're late again! If you can't get here on time, I'll find another way to get to class." Cumulative annoyance can build up like a pressure cooker, and as it builds up, the intensity of the conflict also builds. Criticism and demands can also play into cumulative annoyance. We have all probably let critical or demanding comments slide, but if they continue, it becomes difficult to hold back, and most of us have a breaking point. The problem here is that all the other incidents come back to your mind as you confront the other person, which usually intensifies the conflict. You've likely been surprised when someone has blown up at you due to cumulative annoyance or surprised when someone you have blown up at didn't know there was a problem building. A good strategy for managing cumulative annoyance is to monitor your level of annoyance and occasionally let some steam out of the pressure cooker by processing through your frustration with a third party or directly addressing what is bothering you with the source.

No one likes the feeling of rejection. Rejection can lead to conflict when one person's comments or behaviors are perceived as ignoring or invalidating the other person. Vulnerability is a component of any close relationship. When we care about someone, we verbally or nonverbally communicate. We may tell our best friend that we miss them, or plan a home-cooked meal for our partner who is working late. The vulnerability that underlies these actions comes from the possibility that our relational partner will not notice or appreciate them. When someone feels exposed or rejected, they often respond with anger to mask their hurt, which ignites a conflict. Managing feelings of rejection is difficult because it is so personal, but controlling the impulse to assume that your relational partner is rejecting you, and engaging in communication rather than reflexive reaction, can help put things in perspective. If your partner doesn't get excited about the meal you planned and cooked, it could be because he or she is physically or mentally tired after a long day. Concepts discussed in chapter 2 can be useful here, as perception checking, taking inventory of your attributions, and engaging in information exchange to help determine how each person is punctuating the conflict are useful ways of managing all four of the triggers discussed.

Interpersonal conflict may take the form of *serial arguing*, which is a repeated pattern of disagreement over an issue. Serial arguments do not necessarily indicate negative or troubled relationships, but any kind of patterned conflict is worth paying attention to. There are three patterns that occur with serial arguing: repeating, mutual hostility, and arguing with assurances (Johnson & Roloff, 2000). The first pattern is repeating, which means reminding the other person of your complaint (what you want them to start/stop doing). The pattern may continue if the other person repeats their response to your reminder. For example, if Marita reminds Kate that she doesn't appreciate her sarcastic tone, and Kate responds, "I'm soooo sorry, I forgot how perfect you are," then the reminder has failed to effect the desired change. A predictable pattern of complaint like this leads participants to view the conflict as irresolvable. The second pattern within serial arguments is mutual hostility, which occurs when the frustration of repeated conflict leads to negative emotions and increases the likelihood of verbal aggression. Again, a predictable pattern of hostility makes the conflict seem irresolvable and may lead to relationship deterioration. Whereas the first two patterns entail an increase in pressure on the participants in the conflict, the third pattern offers some relief. If people in an interpersonal conflict offer verbal assurances of their commitment to the relationship, then the problems associated with the other two patterns of serial arguing may be ameliorated. Even though the conflict may not be solved in the interaction, the verbal assurances of commitment imply that there is a willingness to work on solving the conflict in the future, which provides a sense of stability that can benefit the relationship. Although serial arguing is not inherently bad within a relationship, if the pattern becomes more of a vicious cycle, it can lead to alienation, polarization, and an overall toxic climate, and the problem may seem so irresolvable that people feel trapped and terminate the relationship (Christensen & Jacobson, 2000). There are some negative, but common, conflict reactions we can monitor and try to avoid, which may also help prevent serial arguing.

Two common conflict pitfalls are *one-upping* and *mindreading* (Gottman, 1994). is a quick reaction to communication from another person that escalates the conflict. If Sam comes home late from work and Nicki says, "I wish you would call when you're going to be late" and Sam responds, "I wish you would get off my back," the reaction has escalated the conflict. Mindreading is communication in which one person attributes something to the other using generalizations. If Sam says, "You don't care whether I come home at all or not!" she is presuming to know Nicki's thoughts and feelings. Nicki is likely to respond defensively, perhaps saying, "You don't know how I'm feeling!" One-upping and mindreading are often reactions that are more reflexive than deliberate. Remember concepts like attribution and punctuation in these moments. Nicki may have received bad news and was eager to get support from Sam when she arrived home. Although Sam perceives Nicki's comment as criticism and justifies her comments as a reaction to Nicki's behavior, Nicki's comment could actually be a sign of their closeness, in that Nicki appreciates Sam's emotional support. Sam could have said, "I know, I'm sorry, I was on my cell phone for the past hour with a client who had a lot of problems to work out." Taking a moment to respond mindfully rather than react with a knee-jerk reflex can lead to information exchange, which could deescalate the conflict.

Mindreading leads to patterned conflict because we wrongly presume to know what another person is thinking.
Slipperroom – Mysterion the Mind Reader – CC BY-NC 2.0

Validating the person with whom you are in conflict can be an effective way to deescalate conflict. While avoiding or retreating may seem like the best option in the moment, one of the key negative traits found in research on married couples' conflicts was withdrawal, which as we learned before may result in a demand-withdrawal pattern of conflict. Often validation can be as simple as demonstrating good listening skills discussed earlier in this book by making eye contact and giving verbal and nonverbal back-channel cues like saying "mmm-hmm" or nodding your head (Gottman, 1994). This doesn't mean that you have to give up your own side in a conflict or that you agree with what the other person is saying; rather, you are hearing the other person out, which validates them and may also give you some more information about the conflict that could minimize the likelihood of a reaction rather than a response.

As with all the aspects of communication competence we have discussed so far, you cannot expect that everyone you interact with will have the same knowledge of communication that you have after reading this book. But it often only takes one person with conflict management skills to make an interaction more effective. Remember that it's not the quantity of conflict that determines a relationship's success; it's how the conflict is managed, and one person's competent response can deescalate a conflict. Now we turn to a discussion of negotiation steps and skills as a more structured way to manage conflict.

Negotiating

We negotiate daily. We may negotiate with a professor to make up a missed assignment or with our friends to plan activities for the weekend. Negotiation in interpersonal conflict refers to the process of attempting to change or influence conditions within a relationship. The negotiation skills discussed next can be adapted to all types of relational contexts, from romantic partners to coworkers. The stages of negotiating are prenegotiation, opening, exploration, bargaining, and settlement (Hargie, 2011).

In the prenegotiation stage, you want to prepare for the encounter. If possible, let the other person know you would like to talk to them, and preview the topic, so they will also have the opportunity to prepare. While it may seem awkward to "set a date" to talk about a conflict, if the other person feels like they were blindsided, their reaction could be negative. Make your preview simple and nonthreatening by saying something like "I've noticed that we've been arguing a lot about who does what chores around the house. Can we sit down and talk tomorrow when we both get home from class?" Obviously, it won't always be feasible to set a date if the conflict needs to be handled immediately because the consequences are immediate or if you or the other person has limited availability. In that case, you can still prepare, but make sure you allow time for the other person to digest and respond. During this stage, you also want to figure out your goals for the interaction by reviewing your instrumental, relational, and self-presentation goals. Is getting something done, preserving the relationship, or presenting yourself in a certain way the most important? For example, you may highly rank the instrumental goal of having a clean house, or the relational goal of having pleasant interactions with your roommate, or the self-presentation goal of appearing nice and cooperative. Whether your roommate is your best friend from high school or a stranger the school matched you up with could determine the importance of your relational and self-presentation goals. At this point, your goal analysis may lead you away from negotiation—remember, as we discussed earlier, avoiding can be an appropriate and effective conflict management strategy. If you decide to proceed with the negotiation, you will want to determine your ideal outcome and your bottom line, or the point at which you decide to break off the negotiation. It's very important that you realize there is a range between your ideal and your bottom line and that remaining flexible is key to a successful negotiation—remember, through collaboration a new solution could be found that you didn't think of.

In the opening stage of the negotiation, you want to set the tone for the interaction because the other person will be likely to reciprocate. Generally, it is good to be cooperative and pleasant, which can help open the door for collaboration. You also want to establish common ground by bringing up overlapping interests and using "we" language. It would not be competent to open the negotiation with "You're such a slob! Didn't your mom ever teach you how to take care of yourself?" Instead, you may open the negotiation by making small talk about classes that day and then move into the issue at hand. You could set a good tone and establish common ground by saying, "We both put a lot of work into setting up and decorating our space, but now that classes have started, I've noticed that we're really busy and some chores are not getting done." With some planning and a simple opening like that, you can move into the next stage of negotiation.

There should be a high level of information exchange in the exploration stage. The overarching goal in this stage is to get a panoramic view of the conflict by sharing your perspective and listening to the other person. In this stage, you will likely learn how the other person is punctuating the conflict. Although you may have been mulling over the mess for a few days, your roommate may just now be aware of the conflict. She may also inform you that she usually cleans on Sundays but didn't get to last week because she unexpectedly had to visit her parents. The information that you gather here may clarify the situation enough to end the conflict and cease negotiation. If negotiation continues, the information will be key as you move into the bargaining stage.

The bargaining stage is where you make proposals and concessions. The proposal you make should be informed by what you learned in the exploration stage. Flexibility is important here, because you may have to revise your ideal outcome and bottom line based on new information. If your plan was to have a big cleaning day every Thursday, you may now want to propose to have the roommate clean on Sunday while you clean on Wednesday. You want to make sure your opening proposal is reasonable and not presented as an ultimatum. “I don’t ever want to see a dish left in the sink” is different from “When dishes are left in the sink too long, they stink and get gross. Can we agree to not leave any dishes in the sink overnight?” Through the proposals you make, you could end up with a win/win situation. If there are areas of disagreement, however, you may have to make concessions or compromise, which can be a partial win or a partial loss. If you hate doing dishes but don’t mind emptying the trash and recycling, you could propose to assign those chores based on preference. If you both hate doing dishes, you could propose to be responsible for washing your own dishes right after you use them. If you really hate dishes and have some extra money, you could propose to use disposable (and hopefully recyclable) dishes, cups, and utensils.

In the settlement stage, you want to decide on one of the proposals and then summarize the chosen proposal and any related concessions. It is possible that each party can have a different view of the agreed solution. If your roommate thinks you are cleaning the bathroom every other day and you plan to clean it on Wednesdays, then there could be future conflict. You could summarize and ask for confirmation by saying, “So, it looks like I’ll be in charge of the trash and recycling, and you’ll load and unload the dishwasher. Then I’ll do a general cleaning on Wednesdays and you’ll do the same on Sundays. Is that right?” Last, you’ll need to follow up on the solution to make sure it’s working for both parties. If your roommate goes home again next Sunday and doesn’t get around to cleaning, you may need to go back to the exploration or bargaining stage.

Common Conflict Communication Behaviors

Apologies/concessions

Most common of the remedial strategies, an apology is the most straightforward means by which to admit responsibility, express regret, and seek forgiveness. Noted earlier, apologies are most effective if provided in a timely manner and involve a self-disclosure. Apologies occurring after the discovery of a transgression by a third party are much less effective. Though apologies can range from a simple, "I'm sorry" to more elaborate forms, offenders are most successful when offering more complex apologies to match the seriousness of the transgression.

Excuses/justifications

Rather than accepting responsibility for a transgression through the form of an apology, a transgressor who explains why they engaged in behavior is engaging in excuses or justifications. While excuses and justifications aim to minimize blame on the transgressor, the two address blame minimization from completely opposite perspectives. Excuses attempt to minimize blame by focusing on a transgressor's inability to control their actions (e.g., "How would I have known my ex-girlfriend was going to be at the party.") or displace blame on a third party (e.g., "I went to lunch with my ex-girlfriend because I did not want to hurt her feelings."). Conversely, a justification minimizes blame by suggesting that actions surrounding the transgression were justified or that the transgression was not severe. For example, a transgressor may justify having lunch with a past romantic interest, suggesting to their current partner that the lunch meeting was of no major consequence (e.g., "We are just friends.").

Refusals

Refusals are where a transgressor claims no blame for the perceived transgression. This is a departure from apologies and excuses/justifications which involve varying degrees of blame acceptance. In the case of a refusal, the transgressor believes that they have not done anything wrong. Such a situation points out the complexity of relational transgressions. The perceptions of both partners must be taken into account when recognizing and addressing transgressions. For example, Bob and Sally have just started to date, but have not addressed whether they are mutually exclusive. When Bob finds out that Sally has been on a date with someone else, he confronts Sally. Sally may engage in refusal of blame because Bob and Sally had not explicitly noted whether they were mutually exclusive. The problem with these situations is that the transgressor shows no sensitivity to the offended. As such, the offended is less apt to exhibit empathy which is key towards forgiveness. As such, research has shown that refusals tend to aggravate situations, rather than serve as a meaningful repair strategy.

Appeasement/positivity

Appeasement is used to offset hurtful behavior through the transgressor ingratiating themselves in ways such as promising never to commit the hurtful act or being overly kind to their partner. Appeasement may elicit greater empathy from the offended, through soothing strategies exhibited by the transgressor (e.g., complimenting, being more attentive, spending greater time together). However, the danger of appeasement is the risk that the actions of transgressors will be viewed as being artificial. For example, sending your partner flowers every day resulting from infidelity you have committed, may be viewed as downplaying the severity of the transgression if the sending of flowers is not coupled with other soothing strategies that cause greater immediacy.

Avoidance/evasion

Avoidance involves the transgressor making conscious efforts to ignore the transgression (also referred to as "silence"). Avoidance can be effective after an apology is sought and forgiveness is granted (i.e., minimizing discussion around unpleasant subjects once closure has been obtained). However, total avoidance of a transgression where the hurt of the offended is not recognized and forgiveness is not granted can result in further problems in the future. As relational transgressions tend to develop the nature of the relationship through drawing of new rules/boundaries, avoidance of a transgression does not allow for this development. Not surprisingly, avoidance is ineffective as a repair strategy, particularly for instances in which infidelity has occurred.

Relationship talk

Relationship talk is a remediation strategy that focuses on discussing the transgression in the context of the relationship. Aune et al. (1998) identified two types of relationship talk, relationship invocation and metatalk. *Relationship invocation* involves using the relationship as a backdrop for a discussion of the transgression. For example, "We are too committed to this relationship to let it fail.", or "Our relationship is so much better than any of my previous relationships.".**Metatalk** involves discussing the effect of the transgression on the relationship. For example, infidelity may cause partners to redefine rules of the relationship and reexamine the expectations of commitment each partner expects from the other.

Gunnysacking

George Bach and Peter Wyden discuss gunnysacking (or backpacking) as the imaginary bag we all carry into which we place unresolved conflicts or grievances over time. Holding onto the way things used to be can be like a stone in your gunnysack, and influence how you interpret your current context. Gunnysacking may be expressed by bringing up previous behaviors the other has engaged in or previous arguments you felt were unresolved.

Bottling up your frustrations only hurts you and can cause your current relationships to suffer. By addressing, or unpacking, the stones you carry, you can better assess the current situation with the current patterns and variables. We learn from experience but can distinguish between old wounds and current challenges, and try to focus our energies where they will make the most positive impact.

Conflict Management Strategies

Defensiveness versus Supportiveness

Jack Gibb discussed defensive and supportive communication interactions as part of his analysis of conflict management. Defensive communication is characterized by control, evaluation, and judgments, while supportive communication focuses on the points and not personalities. When we feel judged or criticized, our ability to listen can be diminished, and we may only hear the negative message. By choosing to focus on the message instead of the messenger, we keep the discussion supportive and professional.

Face-Detracting and Face-Saving

Communication is not competition. Communication is the sharing of understanding and meaning, but does everyone always share equally? People struggle for control, limit access to resources and information as part of territorial displays, and otherwise use the process of communication to engage in competition. People also use communication for collaboration. Both competition and collaboration can be observed in communication interactions, but there are two concepts central to both: face-detracting and face-saving strategies.

Face-detracting strategies involve messages or statements that take away from the respect, integrity, or credibility of a person. Face-saving strategies protect credibility and separate message from the messenger. For example, you might say that "sales were down this quarter," without specifically noting who was responsible. Sales were simply down. If, however, you ask, "How does the sales manager explain the decline in sales?" you have specifically connected an individual with the negative news. While we may want to specifically connect tasks and job responsibilities to individuals and departments, in terms of language each strategy has distinct results.

Face-detracting strategies often produce a defensive communication climate, inhibit listening, and allow for little room for collaboration. To save face is to raise the issue while preserving a supportive climate, allowing room in the conversation for constructive discussions and problem-solving. By using a face-saving strategy to shift the emphasis from the individual to the issue, we avoid power struggles and personalities, providing each other space to save face (Donohue, W. and Klot, R., 1992).

Empathy

Communication involves not only the words we write or speak, but how and when we write or say them. The way we communicate also carries meaning, and empathy for the individual involves attending to this aspect of interaction. Empathetic listening involves listening to both the literal and implied meanings within a message. For example, the implied meaning might involve understanding what has led this person to feel this way. By paying attention to feelings and emotions associated with content and information, we can build relationships and address conflict more constructively. In management, negotiating conflict is a common task and empathy is one strategy to consider when attempting to resolve issues.

Manging your Emotions

Have you ever seen red, or perceived a situation through rage, anger, or frustration? Then you know that you cannot see or think clearly when you are experiencing strong emotions. There will be times in the work environment when emotions run high. Your awareness of them can help you clear your mind and choose to wait until the moment has passed to tackle the challenge.

"Never speak or make decision in anger" is one common saying that holds true, but not all emotions involve fear, anger, or frustration. A job loss can be a sort of professional death for many, and the sense of loss can be profound. The loss of a colleague to a layoff while retaining your position can bring pain as well as relief, and a sense of survivor's guilt. Emotions can be contagious in the workplace, and fear of the unknown can influence people to act in irrational ways. The wise business communicator can recognize when emotions are on edge in themselves or others, and choose to wait to communicate, problem-solve, or negotiate until after the moment has passed.

Listen without Interrupting

If you are on the receiving end of an evaluation, start by listening without interruption. Interruptions can be internal and external, and warrant further discussion. If your supervisor starts to discuss a point and you immediately start debating the point in your mind, you are paying attention to yourself and what you think they said or are going to say, and not that which is actually communicated. This gives rise to misunderstandings and will cause you to lose valuable information you need to understand and address the issue at hand.

External interruptions may involve your attempt to get a word in edgewise and may change the course of the conversation. Let them speak while you listen, and if you need to take notes to focus your thoughts, take clear notes of what is said, also noting points to revisit later. External interruptions can also take the form of a telephone ringing, a "text message has arrived" chime, or a coworker dropping by in the middle of the conversation.

As an effective business communicator, you know all too well to consider the context and climate of the communication interaction when approaching the delicate subject of evaluations or criticism. Choose a time and place free from interruption. Choose one outside the common space where there may be many observers. Turn off your cell phone. Choose face-to-face communication instead of an impersonal e-mail. By providing a space free of interruption, you are displaying respect for the individual and the information.

Determine the Speaker's Intent

We have discussed previews as a normal part of the conversation, and in this context, they play an important role. People want to know what is coming and generally dislike surprises, particularly when the context of an evaluation is present. If you are on the receiving end, you may need to ask a clarifying question if it doesn't count as an interruption. You may also need to take notes and write down questions that come to mind to address when it is your turn to speak. As a manager, be clear and positive in your opening and lead with praise. You can find one point, even if it is only that the employee consistently shows up to work on time, to highlight before transitioning to a performance issue.

Indicate You Are Listening

In mainstream U.S. culture, eye contact is a signal that you are listening and paying attention to the person speaking. Take notes, nod your head, or lean forward to display interest and listening. Regardless of whether you are the employee receiving the criticism or the supervisor delivering it, displaying listening behavior engenders a positive climate that helps mitigate the challenge of negative news or constructive criticism.

Paraphrase

Restate the main points to paraphrase what has been discussed. This verbal display allows for clarification and acknowledges receipt of the message.

If you are the employee, summarize the main points and consider steps you will take to correct the situation. If none come to mind or you are nervous and are having a hard time thinking clearly, state out loud the main point and ask if you can provide solution steps and strategies at a later date. You can request a follow-up meeting if appropriate, or indicate you will respond in writing via e-mail to provide the additional information.

If you are the employer, restate the main points to ensure that the message was received, as not everyone hears everything that is said or discussed the first time it is presented. Stress can impair listening, and paraphrasing the main points can help address this common response.

Learn from Experience

Every communication interaction provides an opportunity for learning if you choose to see it. Sometimes the lessons are situational and may not apply in future contexts. Other times the lessons learned may well serve you across your professional career. Taking notes for yourself to clarify your thoughts, much like a journal, serve to document and help you see the situation more clearly.

Recognize that some aspects of communication are intentional, and may communicate meaning, even if it is hard to understand. Also, know that some aspects of communication are unintentional, and may not imply meaning or design. People make mistakes. They say things they should not have said. Emotions are revealed that are not always rational, and not always associated with the current context. A challenging morning at home can spill over into the work day and someone's bad mood may have nothing to do with you.

Try to distinguish between what you can control and what you cannot, and always choose professionalism.

Intercultural Conflict Management

Individualism and Collectivism

The strongest cultural factor that influences your conflict approach is whether you belong to an individualistic or collectivistic culture (Ting-Toomey, 1997). People raised in collectivistic cultures often view direct communication regarding conflict as personal attacks (Nishiyama, 1971), and consequently are more likely to manage conflict through avoidance or accommodation. From a collectivistic perspective, the underlying goal in a conflict is not the preservation and manifestation of individual rights and attributes, but rather the preservation of relationships. In this approach, individual rights are superseded by group interest.

The predominant perspective of individualism is to have one's own ideas and act according to the courage of one's convictions. Any perceived constraint on individual freedom is likely to pose immediate problems and require a response. Typically the most appropriate response in a conflict situation involves a direct or honest expression of one's ideas. People from individualistic cultures feel comfortable agreeing to disagree and don't particularly see such clashes as personal affronts (Ting-Toomey, 1985). They are more likely to assert their own position in a conflict, rather than seeking compromise or accommodation.

Gudykunst & Kim (2003) suggest that if you are an individualist in a dispute with a collectivist, you should consider the following:

- Recognize that collectivists may prefer to have a third party mediate the conflict so that those in conflict can manage their disagreement without direct confrontation to preserve relational harmony.
- Use more indirect verbal messages.
- Let go of the situation if the other person does not recognize the conflict exists or does not want to deal with it.

If you are a collectivist and are conflicting with someone from an individualistic culture, the following guidelines may help:

- Recognize that individualists often separate conflicts from

people. It's not personal.
- Use an assertive style, filled with "I" messages, and be direct by candidly stating your opinions and feelings.
- Manage conflicts even if you'd rather avoid them.

Effective conflict resolution serves all parties and preserves harmony. In cross-cultural situations, many scholars advocate the use of face negotiation techniques, as outlined below.

Face

The concept of **face**, often defined as a person's self-image or the amount of respect or accommodation a person expects to receive during interactions with others, plays a crucial role in navigating intercultural conflict. **Conflict Face-Negotiation Theory** (Ting-Toomey, 2004) examines the extent to which face is negotiated within a culture and what existing value patterns shape culture members' preferences for the process of negotiating face in conflict situations. According to the theory, there are three different concepts of face:

- **Self-face**: The concern for one's image, the extent to which we feel valued and respected.
- **Other-face**: Our concern for the other's self-image, the extent to which we are concerned with the other's feelings.
- **Mutual-face**: Concern for both parties' face and for a positive relationship developing out of the interaction.

According to face negotiation theory, people in all cultures share the need to maintain and negotiate face. Some cultures – and individuals – tend to be more concerned with self-face, often associated with individualism. Individualistic cultures prefer a direct way of addressing conflicts, according to the chart presented earlier, a dominating style or, optimally, a collaborating approach.

Addressing a conflict directly is something which particular cultures or people may prefer not to do. Conflict resolution in this case may become confrontational, leading potentially to a loss of face for the other party. Collectivists – cultures or individuals – tend to be more concerned with other-face and may prefer an indirect approach, using subtle or unspoken means to deal with conflict (avoiding, withdrawing, compromising), so as not to challenge the face of the other.

The term **facework** refers to the communication strategies that people use to establish, sustain, or restore a preferred social identity during an interaction with others. Goffman (1959) claims that everyone is concerned about how others perceive them. To lose face is to publicly suffer a diminished self-image, and saving face is to be liked, appreciated, and approved by others. Facework varies from culture to culture and influences conflict styles. Accounting for these differences, Conflict Face-Negotiation Theory recommends a four-skills approach to managing conflict across cultures. These skills are:

- **Mindful Listening:** Pay special attention to the cultural and personal assumptions being expressed in the conflict interaction. Paraphrase verbal and nonverbal content and emotional meaning of the other party's message to check for accurate interpretation.
- **Mindful Reframing:** This is another face-honoring skill that requires the creation of alternative contexts to shape our understanding of the conflict behavior.
- **Collaborative Dialog:** An exchange of dialog that is oriented fully in the present moment and builds on Mindful Listening and Mindful Reframing to practice communicating with different linguistic or contextual resources.
- **Culture-based Conflict Resolution Steps** is a seven-step conflict resolution model that guides conflicting groups to identify the background of a problem, analyze the cultural assumptions and underlying

values

of a person in a conflict situation, and promotes ways to achieve harmony and share a common goal.

- What is my cultural and personal assessment of the problem?
- Why did I form this assessment and what is the source of this assessment?
- What are the underlying assumptions or values

  that drive my assessment?
- How do I know they are relative or valid in this conflict context?
- What reasons might I have for maintaining or changing my underlying conflict premise?
- How should I change my cultural or personal premises into the direction that promotes deeper intercultural

  understanding?
- How should I adapt on both verbal and nonverbal conflict style levels in order to display facework sensitive behaviors and to facilitate a productive common-interest outcome?

(Ting-Toomey, 2012; Fisher-Yoshida, 2005; Mezirow, 2000)

Forgiveness

Individuals tend to experience a wide array of complex emotions following a relational transgression. These emotions are shown to have utility as an initial coping mechanism. For example, fear can result in a protective orientation following a serious transgression;

sadness results in contemplation and reflection while disgust causes us to repel from its source. However, beyond the initial situation, these emotions can be detrimental to one's mental and physical state. Consequently, forgiveness is viewed as a more productive means of dealing with the transgression along with engaging the one who committed the transgression.

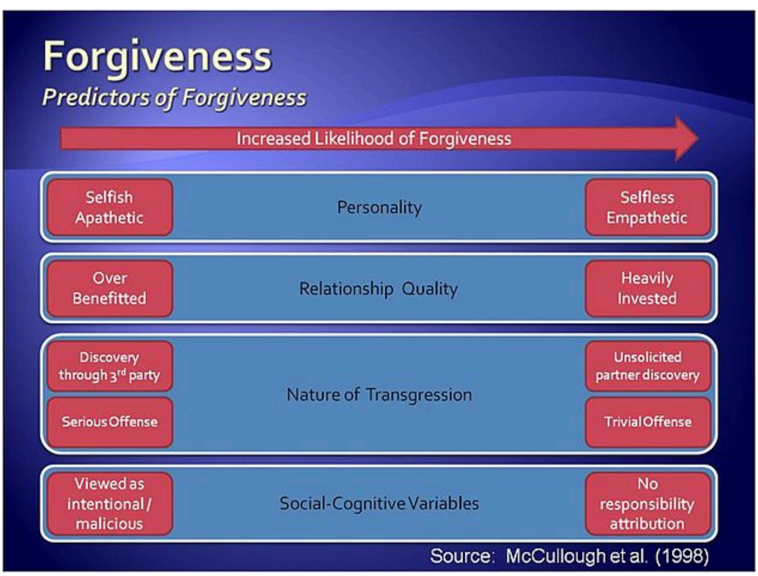
Forgiving is not the act of excusing or condoning. Rather, it is the process whereby negative emotions are transformed into positive emotions for the purpose of bringing emotional normalcy to a relationship. In order to achieve this transformation, the offended must forgo retribution and claims for retribution. McCullough, Worthington, and Rachal (1997) defined forgiveness as a, "set of motivational changes whereby one becomes (a) decreasingly motivated to retaliate against an offending relationship partner, (b) decreasingly motivated to maintain estrangement from the offender, and (c) increasingly motivated by conciliation and goodwill for the offender, despite the offender's hurtful actions". In essence, relational partners choose constructive behaviors that show an emotional commitment and willingness to sacrifice in order to achieve a state of forgiveness.

Dimensions of forgiveness

The link between reconciliation and forgiveness involves exploring two dimensions of forgiveness: intrapsychic and interpersonal. The *intrapsychic dimension* relates to the cognitive processes and interpretations associated with a transgression (i.e. internal state), whereas *interpersonal forgiveness* is the interaction between relational partners. *Total forgiveness* is defined as including both the intrapsychic and interpersonal components which bring about a return to the conditions prior to the transgression. To only change one's internal state is *silent forgiveness*, and only having interpersonal interaction is considered *hollow forgiveness*.

However, some scholars contend that these two dimensions (intrapsychic and interpersonal) are independent as the complexities associated with forgiveness involve gradations of both dimensions. For example, a partner may not relinquish negative emotions yet choose to remain in the relationship because of other factors (e.g., children, financial concerns, etc.). Conversely, one may grant forgiveness and release all negative emotions directed toward their partner, and still exit the relationship because trust cannot be restored. Given this complexity, research has explored whether the transformation of negative emotions to positive emotions eliminates negative affect associated with a given offense. The conclusions drawn from this research suggest that no correlation exists between forgiveness and unforgiveness. Put simply, while forgiveness may be granted for a given transgression, the negative effect may not be reduced a corresponding amount.

Determinants of forgiveness



Predictors of forgiveness

McCullough et al. (1998) outlined predictors of forgiveness into four broad categories

- Personality traits of both partners
- Relationship quality
- Nature of the transgression
- Social-cognitive variables

While personality variables and characteristics of the relationship are preexisting to the occurrence of forgiveness, the nature of the offense and social-cognitive determinants become apparent at the time of the transgression.

Personality traits of both partners

Forgivingness is defined as one's general tendency to forgive transgressions. However, this tendency differs from forgiveness which is a response associated with a specific transgression. Listed below are characteristics of the forgiving personality as described by Emmons (2000).

- Does not seek revenge; effectively regulates negative affect
- Strong desire for a relationship free of conflict
- Shows empathy toward the offender
- Does not personalize hurt associated with transgression

In terms of personality traits, agreeableness and neuroticism (i.e., instability, anxiousness, aggression) show consistency in predicting forgivingness and forgiveness. Since forgiveness requires one to discard any desire for revenge, a vengeful personality tends to not offer forgiveness and may continue to harbor feelings of vengeance long after the transgression occurred.

Research has shown that agreeableness is inversely correlated with motivations for revenge and avoidance, as well as positively correlated with benevolence. As such, one who demonstrates the personality trait of agreeableness is prone to forgiveness as well as has a general disposition of forgivingness. Conversely, neuroticism was positively correlated with avoidance and vengefulness but negatively correlated with benevolence. Consequently, a neurotic personality is less apt to forgive or to have a disposition of forgivingness.

Though the personality traits of the offended have a predictive value of forgiveness, the personality of the offender also has an effect on whether forgiveness is offered. Offenders who show sincerity when seeking forgiveness and are persuasive in downplaying the impact of the transgression will have a positive effect on whether the offended will offer forgiveness.

Narcissistic personalities, for example, may be categorized as persuasive transgressors. This is driven by the narcissist to downplay their transgressions, seeing themselves as perfect and seeking to save face at all costs. Such a dynamic suggests that personality determinants of forgiveness may involve not only the personality of the offended but also that of the offender.

Relationship quality

The quality of a relationship between offended and offending partners can affect whether forgiveness is both sought and given. In essence, the more invested one is in a relationship, the more prone one is to minimize the hurt associated with transgressions and seek reconciliation.

McCullough et al. (1998) provides seven reasons behind why those in relationships will seek to forgive:

1. High investment in the relationship (e.g., children, joint finances, etc.)

2. Views relationship as long term commitment
3. Have a high degree of common interests
4. Is selfless in regard to their partner
5. Willingness to take the viewpoint of partner (i.e. empathy)
6. Assumes motives of partner are in the best interest of relationship (e.g., criticism is taken as constructive feedback)
7. Willingness to apologize for transgressions

Relationship maintenance activities are a critical component to maintaining high-quality relationships. While being heavily invested tends to lead to forgiveness, one may be in a skewed relationship where the partner who is heavily invested is actually under benefitted. This leads to an over benefitted partner who is likely to take the relationship for granted and will not be as prone to exhibit relationship repair behaviors. As such, being mindful of the quality of a relationship will best position partners to address transgressions through a stronger willingness to forgive and seek to normalize the relationship.

Another relationship factor that affects forgiveness is the history of past conflict. If past conflicts ended badly (i.e., reconciliation/forgiveness was either not achieved or achieved after much conflict), partners will be less prone to seek out or offer forgiveness. As noted earlier, maintaining a balanced relationship (i.e. no partner over/under benefitted) has a positive effect on relationship quality and tendency to forgive. In that same vein, partners are more likely to offer forgiveness if their partners had recently forgiven them for a transgression. However, if a transgression is repeated resentment begins to build which has an adverse effect on the offended partner's desire to offer forgiveness.

Nature of the transgression

The most notable feature of a transgression to have an effect on forgiveness is the seriousness of the offense. Some transgressions are perceived as being so serious that they are considered unforgivable. To counter the negative affect associated with a severe transgression, the offender may engage in repair strategies to lessen the perceived hurt of the transgression. The offender's communication immediately following a transgression has the greatest predictive value on whether forgiveness will be granted.

Consequently, offenders who immediately apologize, take responsibility, and show remorse have the greatest chance of obtaining forgiveness from their partner.Further, self-disclosure of a transgression yields much greater results than if a partner is informed of the transgression through a third party. By taking responsibility for one's actions and being forthright through self-disclosure of an offense, partners may actually form closer bonds from the reconciliation associated with a serious transgression. As noted in the section on personality, repeated transgressions cause these relationship repair strategies to have a more muted effect as resentment begins to build and trust erodes.

Social-cognitive variables

Attributions of responsibility for a given transgression may have an adverse effect on forgiveness. Specifically, if a transgression is viewed as intentional or malicious, the offended partner is less likely to feel empathy and forgive. Based on the notion that forgiveness is driven primarily by empathy, the offender must accept responsibility and seek forgiveness immediately following the transgression, as apologies have shown to elicit empathy from the offended partner. The resulting feelings of empathy elicited in the offended partner may cause them to better relate to the guilt and loneliness their partner may feel as a result of the transgression. In this state of mind, the offended partner is more likely to seek to normalize the relationship through granting forgiveness and restoring closeness with their partner.

Key Takeaways

1. Interpersonal conflict is an inevitable part of relationships that, although not always negative, can take an emotional toll on relational partners unless they develop skills and strategies for managing conflict.
2. Although there is no absolute right or wrong way to handle a conflict, there are five predominant styles of conflict management, which are competing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising, and collaborating.
3. Perception plays an important role in conflict management because we are often biased in determining the cause of our own and others' behaviors in a conflict situation, which necessitates engaging in communication to gain information and perspective.
4. Culture influences how we engage in conflict based on our cultural norms regarding individualism or collectivism and concern for self-face or other-face.
5. We can handle conflict better by identifying patterns and triggers such as demands, cumulative annoyance, and rejection and by learning to respond mindfully rather than reflexively.
6. Conflict is unavoidable and can be an opportunity for clarification, growth, and even reinforcement of the relationship.
7. Forgiveness, while difficult, can help us to move on from relationship transgessions.

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7.4 Assertive Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Compare ways to assert yourself.
2. Follow the six-step assertion process.

Assertive Communication

Ways to Assert Yourself

I-Statements – Owning your Voice

One way to effectively manage conflict is to own your story and your voice by using *I-statements*. Statements that directly express your thoughts, needs, feelings, and experiences to the people around you. I-statements allow us to take responsibility for our experiences and places the power of our lives in our hands. I-statements look like this:

- I feel…
- I think…
- I experienced it like this…
- I want…
- I need…

I-statements are contrasted with *You-statements*. Statements that imply the other person is responsible for something. You-statements typically blame the other person. You statements look like this:

- You made me feel…
- You don't care about me.
- You never think about how that would impact us.
- You didn't…

I-Statements vs You-Statements	
I felt unappreciated.	You don't care about me.
I need some help.	You are a freeloader and never help.
I felt…	You made me feel….
It makes me sad to be left out.	You never invite me out with your friends.

Watch out for those *fake* I-Statements that so regularly sneak into our conversations. "I feel you…", "I think you", "I want you to…" are hidden You-Statements.

Asking Great Questions

The key to asking really great questions is being a really great listener. If you are listening, actively, you will recognize what information you are missing, or what you need clarification on. Below is a look at some basic types of questions to understand and master.

There is a general distinction made between *Open Ended Questions*, questions that likely require some thought and/or more than a yes/no answer, and *Close Ended Questions***,** questions that only require a specific answer and/or a yes/no answer. This is an important distinction to understand and remember. In the context of managing conflict open ended questions are utilized for Information Gathering and close ended questions are used for Clarifying concepts or ideas you have heard. Here are examples of these types of questions.

Use Clarifying Questions

- Is this what you said…?
- Did I hear you say…?
- Did I understand you when you said…?
- Did I hear you correctly when you said…?
- Did I paraphrase what you said correctly?
- So this took place on….?
- So you would like to see…?

Use Information Gathering Questions

- If there was one small way that things could be better starting today, what would that be?
- How did you feel when…?
- How could you have handled it differently?
- When did it began?
- When did you first notice…?
- When did that happen?
- Where did it happen?
- What was that all about?
- What happened then?
- What would you like to do about it?
- I want to understand from your perspective, would you please tell me again?
- What do you think would make this better going forward?
- What criteria did you use to…?
- What's another way you might…?
- What resources were used for the project?
- Tell me more about… (not a question, but an open ended prompt)

A type of question to watch out for is *Leading Questions*, which provides a direction or answer for someone to agree or disagree with. An example would be, "So you are going to vote for____ for president, aren't you?" or "What they did is unbelievable, don't you agree?" These questions can easily be turned into information gathering questions, "Who are you going to vote for this year?" or "What do you this about their behavior?"

Drawing Boundaries – Developing Assertive Messages

Boundaries and Assertiveness

One word that is often used for being assertive in our society today is to draw or hold our "boundaries". In a physical space, boundaries are easy to identify, such as a fence, stop signs, or a door. Boundaries in our social experiences are not as easy to identify but are just as real and important as physical boundaries. Fences and doors tell us where it is safe to go, and how to behave. The same is true when we are assert our social boundaries, think of them as the invisible fences or doors we draw in our lives. Asserting our social boundaries, tell those around us what is acceptable and what isn't acceptable in our interaction, they are the guidelines and rules we provide people around us for how we want our relationship with them to look.

Sometimes even when you assert yourself and hold your boundaries, the people in your life might not respect them. Robert Bolton (1979) shares with us that part of being assertive and holding boundaries might be:

Selective Inattention – ignoring unwanted behavior if it is a one time occurrence

Temporary Withdrawl – taking time away from a relationship that doesn't respect your boundaries

Permanent Withdrawl – ending a relationship because your boundaries aren't respected

Think about this as an order of progression. You assert your boundaries, if they aren't respected you can ignore the other person's behavior and assert yourself again. If this person continues to step on and not respect your boundaries you might need to take some time apart. If that behavior continues, you might need to end that relationship. This can happen with friends, partners, co-workers, and even family.

A basic act of being assertive is simply **saying "no"**. Saying no without little white lies or justifying why you are saying no takes some practice. Have you ever been invited out with friends but didn't want to go? Did you make something up? "I'm busy" when really you just don't want to go out. Being assertive in that moment looks like "I really appreciate the offer, and I hope you invite me in the future, but no, I just need some me time".

Robert Bolton (1979), gives us a simple but effective template for developing assertive messages to help us draw boundaries:

When you__________ (a nonjudgmental description of someones behavior)

I feel_____ (a specific feeling)

Because____ (how someone's behavior directly impacts you, how they have crossed a boundary)

While this assertion template seems really simple, it actually can be quite challenging to utilize. Some tips for making sure that you are asserting your boundaries in a productive way.

- Focus on one behavior at a time. *If you have been more passive in your communications you might want to jump into drawing all the boundaries. Pick one to start with and work from there*
- Describe the behavior you chose to focus on in a nonjudgmental way (easier than it sounds) with nonjudgmental language. *Example – "When you don't pick up your crap" vs "When you leave dirty laundry in the bathroom"*
- Pick a very specific feeling (most specifics on this below)
- Watch out for a feeling statement that says "I feel you…" the feeling word should describe your feeling in this situation, not be about the other person *Example- "I feel like you don't care" vs "I feel hurt"*
- When you describe the impact on you, really express how someones behavior impacts you. *Think back to the types of goals or SCARF model trigger, express what is really going on for you*
- Keep it concise.
- Use this template for positive reinforcement of behavior you want to keep seeing. *When you pick up your dirty clothes, I feel appreciative, because I don't have to take time to pick them up.*

Framing and Reframing

Framing

Framing, in communication, is essentially the act of intentionally setting the stage for the conversation you want to have. In framing a conversation you express why you want to engage in this topic, what your intent is, and what you hope the outcome can be for resolving the conflict, as well as the impact/importance of your relationship. When you frame a conversation, you take out the need for the other person to assume what your intentions and motives are or why you are bringing this topic up right now.

There are many ways to frame a conversation, here are a few ideas for how to frame a conversation effectively.

Ask about Timing

"I have been wanting to connect with you to discuss___. Would now be a good time?" (If the answer is no, take a minute to schedule a good time)

Share Why's, Concerns, and Intentions

"This is important to me because….."

"I'm only bringing this up because I want us and this project to be successful and I'm worried that we are missing something."

"My intention is…."

"My intention is to share my thoughts with you, but I don't have any expectations that you do anything with them."

"I care about our relationships and want to make sure we are addressing challenges as they come up." "I'm not sure how this will go."

"I'm pretty stressed about this because I'm not sure how this conversation is going to go."

"I have been thinking about this a lot and figured it was time to ask for help."

Frame a Boundary

"I know this is important to you and I'm just too busy to go to that concert right now. "

"I can see this isn't a good time to talk, so I'd like to set up a time that works better."

"I'm sorry, I already have too much on my plate."

"I appreciate you thinking of me for this project. I'm currently working on X, which means unfortunately, I can't do both and have to say no to your request."

Framing sets the stage for the rest of the conversation to unfold. A little bit of framing goes a long way in helping conversations be more productive, and help manage some of the conflict that can happen when people have to make assumptions about "why" and conversation or conflict is happening.

For more ideas around framing, The Gottman institute has a really great infographic that shares their version of framing, Harsh Start Ups vs Soft Start Ups.

Reframing

Framing happens at the beginning of a conversation, r*eframing* happens when things get off track and you need to bring a conversation back on topic. Consider this picture.

In the center of the picture is a Frame, that is only covering part of the ocean and cliff. If we expanded that frame to surround the entire picture, that would be reframing. Reframing, in a conversation, helps us see more of what is going on, helps us focus on the larger picture or our end goals, and helps defuse tense situations. Reframing can be used for many things when managing conflict.

- Defusing inflammatory language
- Recasting negatives into neutral or positive statements
- Refocusing attention
- Acknowledging strong emotions in a productive manner
- Translating communication so that it is more likely to be heard and acknowledged by other parties
- Recontextualizing the dispute, providing a broader perspective

Reframing Examples	
Original Statement	Reframed Statement
“You misinterpret everything.”	“We must be misunderstanding each other. Can you help me understand what you meant”
“I am fed up with your negative response to everything that is proposed.”	“I agree. Let’s focus on finding a solution and move away from negativity.”
“Can we just keep talking about this one detail?”	“If you are okay with it, can we make sure we have the big picture figured out before focusing on details? Maybe the details will become more clear then.”
“That seems really petty! Can you believe that keeps happening?”	“That sounds irritating. What do you need to move past this moment and look for a solution.”

6 Step Assertion Process

Imagine you know it’s time to draw a boundary with someone close to you, you’ve thought long and hard about what is important to you, you know what you want to say, So what do you do now?

Robert Bolton (1979), gives us a process to follow when delivering our assertion.

1) Preparation
2) Delivering the Message
3) Silence
4) Active Listening
5) Recycle steps 2-4 (as necessary)
6) Focus on a Solution

Preparation – In the preparation stage you spend time, before you enter into a conversation with the other person, reflecting on what is important for you to convey, developing your framing (from chapter 3) and assertion message, and preparing yourself for this process and active listening.

Deliver the Message – Share your frame and your assertion message

Silence – Allow the other person time to process what you have just said. Sometimes after we assert ourselves, we want to justify ourselves, or jump in when there is silence because it can be awkward and uncomfortable. Take a deep breath while they consider what you have just said, they may have not considered this topic before this very moment.

Active Listening – Once the person responds to your assertion, your job is to reflect back what their response is. This response could be defensive, it could be off track from your original topic, or they could shut down. Actively listening to the other person will likely be the last thing you want to do, so make sure to prepare for this part of the process as much as you can in the preparation step.

Recycle Steps 2-4 (as necessary) – You will likely have to reassert yourself, provide more silence, and actively listen a few times, before you can move into the next step in the process. This part of the process allow you and the other person to really understand each other and get on the same page.

Focus on A Solution – Often times in conflict we jump to this step *without* taking the time to go through steps 1-5. Only focus on a solution after you have understood the other person, they have understood you, and you are both ready and capable of focusing on a solution.

Key Takeaways

1. Different methods of assertive communication will help you get your needs met in differing situations.
2. Following an assertive format can help us to express our feelings, and ask for behaviors changes.
3. The assertion process can help us prepare for successful assertive communication.

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PART VIII

CHAPTER 8: INTERPERSONAL WORKPLACE RELATIONSHIPS

Humans have always been diverse in their cultural beliefs and practices. But as new technologies have led to the perception that our world has shrunk, and demographic and political changes have brought attention to cultural differences, people communicate across cultures more now than ever before. The oceans and continents that separate us can now be traversed instantly with an e-mail, phone call, tweet, or status update. Additionally, our workplaces, schools, and neighborhoods have become more integrated in terms of race and gender, increasing our interaction with domestic diversity. The Disability Rights Movement and Gay Rights Movement have increased the visibility of people with disabilities and sexual minorities. But just because we are exposed to more difference doesn't mean we understand it, can communicate across it, or appreciate it. This chapter will help you do all three.

8.1 Relationships at Work

Learning Objectives

1. List the different types of workplace relationships.
2. Describe the communication patterns in the supervisor-subordinate relationship.
3. Describe the different types of peer coworker relationships.
4. Evaluate the positives and negatives of workplace romances.

Although some careers require less interaction than others, all jobs require interpersonal communication skills. Shows like *The Office* and *The Apprentice* offer glimpses into the world of workplace relationships. These humorous examples often highlight the dysfunction that can occur within a workplace. Since many people spend as much time at work as they do with their family and friends, the workplace becomes a key site for relational development. The workplace relationships we'll discuss in this section include supervisor-subordinate relationships, workplace friendships, and workplace romances (Sias, 2009).

Supervisor-Subordinate Relationships

Given that most workplaces are based on hierarchy, it is not surprising that relationships between supervisors and their subordinates develop (Sias, 2009). The supervisor-subordinate relationship can be primarily based in mentoring, friendship, or romance and includes two people, one of whom has formal authority over the other. In any case, these relationships involve some communication challenges and rewards that are distinct from other workplace relationships.

Information exchange is an important part of any relationship, whether it is self-disclosure about personal issues or disclosing information about a workplace to a new employee. Supervisors are key providers of information, especially for newly hired employees who have to negotiate through much uncertainty as they are getting oriented. The role a supervisor plays in orienting a new employee is important, but it is not based on the same norm of reciprocity that many other relationships experience at their onset. On a first date, for example, people usually take turns communicating as they learn about each other. Supervisors, on the other hand, have information power because they possess information that the employees need to do their jobs. The imbalanced flow of communication in this instance is also evident in the supervisor's role as evaluator. Most supervisors are tasked with giving their employees formal and informal feedback on their job performance. In this role, positive feedback can motivate employees, but what happens when a supervisor has negative feedback? Research shows that supervisors are more likely to avoid giving negative feedback if possible, even though negative feedback has been shown to be more important than positive feedback for employee development. This can lead to strains in a relationship if behavior that is in need of correcting persists, potentially threatening the employer's business and the employee's job.

We're all aware that some supervisors are better than others and may have even experienced working under good and bad bosses. So what do workers want in a supervisor? Research has shown that employees more positively evaluate supervisors when they are of the same gender and race (Sias, 2009). This isn't surprising, given that we've already learned that attraction is often based on similarity. In terms of age, however, employees prefer their supervisors be older than them, which is likely explained by the notion that knowledge and wisdom come from experience built over time. Additionally, employees are more satisfied with supervisors who exhibit a more controlling personality than their own, likely because of the trust that develops when an employee can trust that their supervisor can handle his or her responsibilities. Obviously, if a supervisor becomes coercive or is an annoying micromanager, the controlling has gone too far. High-quality supervisor-subordinate relationships in a workplace reduce employee turnover and have an overall positive impact on the organizational climate (Sias, 2005). Another positive effect of high-quality supervisor-subordinate relationships is the possibility of mentoring.

The mentoring relationship can be influential in establishing or advancing a person's career, and supervisors are often in a position to mentor select employees. In a mentoring relationship, one person functions as a guide, helping another navigate toward career goals (Sias, 2009). Through workplace programs or initiatives sponsored by professional organizations, some mentoring relationships are formalized. Informal mentoring relationships develop as shared interests or goals bring two people together. Unlike regular relationships between a supervisor and subordinate that focus on a specific job or tasks related to a job, the mentoring relationship is more extensive. In fact, if a mentoring relationship succeeds, it is likely that the two people will be separated as the mentee is promoted within the organization or accepts a more advanced job elsewhere—especially if the mentoring relationship was formalized. Mentoring relationships can continue in spite of geographic distance, as many mentoring tasks can be completed via electronic communication or through planned encounters at conferences or other professional gatherings. Supervisors aren't the only source of mentors, however, as peer coworkers can also serve in this role.

Workplace Friendships

Relationships in a workplace can range from someone you say hello to almost daily without knowing her or his name, to an acquaintance in another department, to your best friend that you go on vacations with. We've already learned that proximity plays an important role in determining our relationships, and most of us will spend much of our time at work in proximity to and sharing tasks with particular people. However, we do not become friends with all our coworkers.

As with other relationships, perceived similarity and self-disclosure play important roles in workplace relationship formation. Most coworkers are already in close proximity, but they may break down into smaller subgroups based on department, age, or even whether or not they are partnered or have children (Sias, 2005). As individuals form relationships that extend beyond being acquaintances at work, they become peer coworkers. A peer coworker relationship refers to a workplace relationship between two people who have no formal authority over the other and are interdependent in some way. This is the most common type of interpersonal workplace relationship, given that most of us have many people we would consider peer coworkers and only one supervisor (Sias, 2005).

Peer coworkers can be broken down into three categories: information, collegial, and special peers (Sias, 2005). Information peers communicate about work-related topics only, and there is a low level of self-disclosure and trust. These are the most superficial of the peer coworker relationships, but that doesn't mean they are worthless. Almost all workplace relationships start as information peer relationships. As noted, information exchange is an important part of workplace relationships, and information peers can be very important in helping us through the day-to-day functioning of our jobs. We often form information peers with people based on a particular role they play within an organization. Communicating with a union representative, for example, would be an important information-based relationship for an employee. Collegial peers engage in more self-disclosure about work and personal topics and communicate emotional support. These peers also provide informal feedback through daily conversations that help the employee develop a professional identity (Sias, 2009). In an average-sized workplace, an employee would likely have several people they consider collegial peers. Special peers have high levels of self-disclosure with relatively few limitations and are highly interdependent in terms of providing emotional and professional support for one another (Kram & Isabella, 1985). Special peer relationships are the rarest and mirror the intimate relationships we might have with a partner, close sibling, or parent. As some relationships with information peers grow toward collegial peers, elements of a friendship develop.

Having coworkers who are also friends enhances information exchange and can lead to greater job satisfaction.

Three Coworkers – CC BY-SA 2.0.

Even though we might not have a choice about whom we work with, we do choose who our friends at work will be. Coworker relationships move from strangers to friends much like other friendships. Perceived similarity may lead to more communication about workplace issues, which may lead to self-disclosure about non-work-related topics, moving a dyad from acquaintances to friends. Coworker friendships may then become closer as a result of personal or professional problems. For example, talking about family or romantic troubles with a coworker may lead to increased closeness as self-disclosure becomes deeper and more personal. Increased time together outside of work may also strengthen a workplace friendship (Sias & Cahill, 1998). Interestingly, research has shown that close friendships are more likely to develop among coworkers when they perceive their supervisor to be unfair or unsupportive. In short, a bad boss apparently leads people to establish closer friendships with coworkers, perhaps as a way to get the functional and relational support they are missing from their supervisor.

Friendships between peer coworkers have many benefits, including making a workplace more intrinsically rewarding, helping manage job-related stress, and reducing employee turnover. Peer friendships may also supplement or take the place of more formal mentoring relationships (Sias & Cahill, 1998). Coworker friendships also serve communicative functions, creating an information chain, as each person can convey information they know about what's going on in different areas of an organization and let each other know about opportunities for promotion or who to avoid. Friendships across departmental boundaries in particular have been shown to help an organization adapt to changing contexts. Workplace friendships may also have negative effects. Obviously information chains can be used for workplace gossip, which can be unproductive. Additionally, if a close friendship at work leads someone to continue to stay in a job that they don't like for the sake of the friendship, then the friendship is not serving the interests of either person or the organization. Although this section has focused on peer coworker friendships, some friendships have the potential to develop into workplace romances.

Romantic Workplace Relationships

Workplace romances involve two people who are emotionally and physically attracted to one another (Sias, 2009). We don't have to look far to find evidence that this relationship type is the most controversial of all workplace relationships. For example, the president of the American Red Cross was fired in 2007 for having a personal relationship with a subordinate. That same year, the president of the World Bank resigned after controversy over a relationship with an employee (Boyd, 2010). So what makes these relationships so problematic?

Some research supports the claim that workplace romances are bad for business, while other research claims workplace romances enhance employee satisfaction and productivity. Despite this controversy, workplace romances are not rare or isolated, as research shows 75 to 85 percent of people are affected by a romantic relationship at work as a participant or observer (Sias, 2009). People who are opposed to workplace romances cite several common reasons. More so than friendships, workplace romances bring into the office emotions that have the potential to become intense. This doesn't mesh well with a general belief that the workplace should not be an emotional space. Additionally, romance brings sexuality into workplaces that are supposed to be asexual, which also creates a gray area in which the line between sexual attraction and sexual harassment is blurred (Sias, 2009). People who support workplace relationships argue that companies shouldn't have a say in the personal lives of their employees and cite research showing that workplace romances increase productivity. Obviously, this is not a debate that we can settle here. Instead, let's examine some of the communicative elements that affect this relationship type.

Individuals may engage in workplace romances for many reasons, three of which are job motives, ego motives, and love motives (Sias, 2009). Job motives include gaining rewards such as power, money, or job security. Ego motives include the "thrill of the chase" and the self-esteem boost one may get. Love motives include the desire for genuine affection and companionship. Despite the motives, workplace romances impact coworkers, the individuals in the relationship, and workplace policies. Romances at work may fuel gossip, especially if the couple is trying to conceal their relationship. This could lead to hurt feelings, loss of trust, or even jealousy. If coworkers perceive the relationship is due to job motives, they may resent the appearance of favoritism and feel unfairly treated. The individuals in the relationship may experience positive effects such as increased satisfaction if they get to spend time together at work and may even be more productive. Romances between subordinates and supervisors are more likely to slow productivity. If a relationship begins to deteriorate, the individuals may experience more stress than other couples would, since they may be required to continue to work together daily.

Over the past couple of decades, there has been a national discussion about whether or not organizations should have policies related to workplace relationships, and there are many different opinions. Company policies range from the complete prohibition of romantic relationships, to policies that only specify supervisor-subordinate relationships as off-limits, to policies that don't prohibit but discourage love affairs in the workplace (Sias, 2009). One trend that seeks to find a middle ground is the "love contract" or "dating waiver" (Boyd, 2010). This requires individuals who are romantically involved to disclose their relationship to the company and sign a document saying that it is consensual and they will not engage in favoritism. Some businesses are taking another route and encouraging workplace romances. Southwest Airlines, for example, allows employees of any status to date each other and even allows their employees to ask passengers out on a date. Other companies like AT&T and Ben and Jerry's have similar open policies (Boyd, 2010).

Interpersonal Relationships at Work

Second to spending time with your family, you'll probably end up spending more time working than anything else you do for the rest of your life (besides sleeping). Figure 13.1 shows you what the average full-time working person's day is like.

During the five-day work week, we spend more time with the people we work with than the people we live with during the five-day workweek. So, it shouldn't be too surprising that our workplace relationships tend to be very important to our overall quality of life. In previous chapters, we've looked at the importance of a range of different types of relationships. In this chapter, we're going to explore some areas directly related to workplace interpersonal relationships, including professionalism, leader-follower relationships, workplace friendships, romantic relationships in the workplace, and problematic workplace relationships. Finally, we'll end this chapter by discussing essential communication skills for work in the 21st Century.

Key Takeaways

- The supervisor-subordinate relationship includes much information exchange that usually benefits the subordinate. However, these relationships also have the potential to create important mentoring opportunities.
- Peer coworker relationships range from those that are purely information based to those that are collegial and include many or all of the dimensions of a friendship.

- Workplace romances are controversial because they bring the potential for sexuality and intense emotions into the workplace, which many people find uncomfortable. However, research has shown that these relationships also increase employee satisfaction and productivity in some cases.

Exercises

1. Describe a relationship that you have had where you were either the mentor or the mentee. How did the relationship form? What did you and the other person gain from the relationship?
2. Think of a job you have had and try to identify someone you worked with who fit the characteristics of an information and a collegial peer. Why do you think the relationship with the information peer didn't grow to become a collegial peer? What led you to move from information peer to collegial peer with the other person? Remember that special peers are the rarest, so you may not have an experience with one. If you do, what set this person apart from other coworkers that led to such a close relationship?
3. If you were a business owner, what would your policy on workplace romances be and why?
4. Think of a time in an organization where you witnessed unethical organizational communication. Which components of Redding's typology did you

witness? Did you do anything about the unethical organizational communication? Why?

5. Look at the list of respectful behaviors for workplace interactions. How would you react if others violated these respectful behaviors towards you as a coworker?

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8.2 Workplace Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Contract common and divergent cultural characteristics of the workplace.
2. Discuss professionalism.
3. Evaluate professional communication.

Cultural Characteristics of the Workplace – Commonalities

While we may be members of many different cultures, we tend to adhere to some more than others. Perhaps you have become friendly with several of your fellow students as you've pursued your studies in college. As you take many of the same classes and share many experiences on campus, you begin to have more and more in common, in effect forming a small group culture of your own. A similar cultural formation process may happen in the workplace, where coworkers spend many hours each week sharing work experiences and getting to know each other socially in the process.

Groups come together, form cultures, and grow apart across time.

How does one become a member of a community, and how do you know when you are a full member? What aspects of culture do we have in common and how do they relate to business communication? Researchers who have studied cultures around the world have identified certain characteristics that define a culture. These characteristics are expressed in different ways, but they tend to be present in nearly all cultures. Let's examine them.

Rites of Initiation

Cultures tend to have a ritual for becoming a new member. A newcomer starts out as a nonentity, a stranger, an unaffiliated person with no connection or even possibly awareness of the community. Newcomers who stay around and learn about the culture become members. Most cultures have a rite of initiation that marks the passage of the individual within the community; some of these rituals may be so informal as to be hardly noticed (e.g., the first time a coworker asks you to join the group to eat lunch together), while others may be highly formalized (e.g., the ordination of clergy in a religion). The nonmember becomes a member, the new member becomes a full member, and individuals rise in terms of responsibility and influence.

Business communities are communities first because without communication interaction, no business will occur. Even if sales and stock are processed by servers that link database platforms to flow, individuals are still involved in the maintenance, repair, and development of the system. Where there is communication, there is culture, and every business has several cultures.

Across the course of your life, you have no doubt passed several rites of initiation but may not have taken notice of them. Did you earn a driver's license, register to vote, or acquire the permission to purchase alcohol? In North American culture, these three common markers indicate the passing from a previous stage of life to a new one, with new rights and responsibilities. As a child, you were not allowed to have a driver's license. At age fourteen to eighteen, depending on your state and location (rural versus urban), you were allowed to drive a tractor, use farm equipment, operate a motor vehicle during daylight hours, or have full access to public roads. With the privilege of driving comes responsibility. It is your responsibility to learn what the signs and signals mean and to obey traffic laws for the common safety. In order for stop signs to work, we all have to agree on the behavior associated with them and observe that behavior.

Sometimes people choose to ignore a stop sign, or accidentally miss one, and it places the public in danger. Law enforcement officials reinforce that common safety as representatives of the culture, empowered by the people themselves based on a common agreement of what a stop sign means and what a driver is supposed to do when approaching one. Some people may argue that law enforcement serves some while it prosecutes others. This point of debate may deserve some consideration, but across cultures, there are rules, signs, and symbols that we share.

Rites of initiation mark the transition of the role or status of the individual within the group. Your first day on the job may have been a challenge as you learned your way around the physical space, but the true challenge was to learn how the group members communicate with each other. If you graduate from college with a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree, you will already have passed a series of tests, learned terms and theories, and possess a symbol of accomplishment in your diploma, but that only grants you the opportunity to look for a job—to seek access to a new culture.

In every business, there are groups, power struggles, and unspoken ways that members earn their way from the role of a "newbie" to that of a full member. The newbie may get the tough account, the office without a window, or the cubicle next to the bathroom, denoting low status. As the new member learns to navigate through the community—establishing a track record and being promoted—he passes the rite of initiation and acquires new rights and responsibilities.

Over time, the person comes to be an important part of the business, a “keeper of the flame.” The “flame” may not exist in physical space or time, but it does exist in the minds of those members in the community who have invested time and effort in the business. It is not a flame to be trusted to a new person, as it can only be earned with time. Along the way, there may be personality conflicts and power struggles over resources and perceived scarcity (e.g., there is only one promotion and everyone wants it). All these challenges are to be expected in any culture.

Common History and Traditions

Think for a moment about the history of a business like Ford Motor Company—what are your associations with Henry Ford, the assembly line manufacturing system, or the Model T? Or the early days of McDonald’s? Do you have an emotional response to mental images of the “golden arches” logo, Ronald McDonald, or the Big Mac sandwich? Traditions form as the organization grows and expands, and stories are told and retold to educate new members on how business should be conducted. The history of every culture, of every corporation, influences the present. There are times when the phrase “we’ve tried that before” can become stumbling block for members of the organization as it grows and adapts to new market forces. There may be struggles between members who have weathered many storms and new members, who come armed with new educational perspectives, technological tools, or experiences that may contribute to growth.

Common Values and Principles

Cultures all hold values and principles that are commonly shared and communicated from older members to younger (or newer) ones. Time and length of commitment are associated with an awareness of these values and principles, so that new members, whether they are socialized at home, in school, or at work, may not have a thorough understanding of their importance. For example, time (fast customer service) and cleanliness are two cornerstone values of the McDonald's corporation. A new employee may take these for granted, while a seasoned professional who inspects restaurants may see the continued need to reinforce these core values. Without reinforcement, norms may gradually change, and if this were the case it could fundamentally change the customer experience associated with McDonald's.

Common Purpose and Sense of Mission

Cultures share a common sense of purpose and mission. Why are we here and whom do we serve? These are fundamental questions of the human condition that philosophers and theologians all over the world have pondered for centuries. In business, the answers to these questions often address purpose and mission, and they can be found in mission and vision statements of almost every organization. Individual members will be expected to acknowledge and share the mission and vision, actualize them, or make them real through action. Without action, the mission and vision statements are simply an arrangement of words. As a guide to individual and group behavioral norms, they can serve as a powerful motivator and a call to action.

Common Symbols, Boundaries, Status, Language, and Rituals

Most of us learn early in life what a stop sign represents, but do we know what military stripes represent on a sleeve, or a ten-year service pin on a lapel, or a corner office with two windows? Cultures have common symbols that mark them as a group; the knowledge of what a symbol stands for helps to reinforce who is a group member and who is not. You may have a brand on your arm from your fraternity, or wear a college ring—symbols that represent groups you affiliate with temporarily, while you are a student. They may or may not continue to hold meaning to you when your college experience is over. Cultural symbols include dress, such as the Western business suit and tie, the Scottish kilt, or the Islamic headscarf. Symbols also include slogans or sayings, such as "you're in good hands" or "you deserve a break today." The slogan may serve a marketing purpose but may also embrace a mission or purpose within the culture. Family crests and clan tartan patterns serve as symbols of affiliation. Symbols can also be used to communicate rank and status within the group.

Space is another common cultural characteristic; it may be a nonverbal symbol that represents status and power. In most of the world's cultures, a person occupying superior status is entitled to a physically elevated position—a throne, a dais, a podium from which to address subordinates. Subordinates may be expected to bow, curtsy, or lower their eyes as a sign of respect. In business, the corner office may offer the best view with the most space. Movement from a cubicle to a private office may also be a symbol of transition within an organization, involving increased responsibility as well as power. Parking spaces, the kind of vehicle you drive, and the transportation allowance you have may also serve to communicate symbolic meaning within an organization.

The office serves our discussion on the second point concerning boundaries. Would you sit on your boss's desk or sit in his chair with your feet up on the desk in his presence? Most people indicate they would not, because doing so would communicate a lack of respect, violate normative space expectations, and invite retaliation. Still, subtle challenges to authority may arise in the workplace. A less than flattering photograph of the boss at the office party posted to the recreational room bulletin board communicates more than a lack of respect for authority. By placing the image anonymously in a public place, the prankster clearly communicates a challenge, even if it is a juvenile one. Movement from the cubicle to the broom closet may be the result for someone who is found responsible for the prank. Again, there are no words used to communicate meaning, only symbols, but those symbols represent significant issues.

Communities have their own vocabulary and way in which they communicate. Consider the person who uses a sewing machine to create a dress and the accountant behind the desk; both are professionals and both have specialized jargon used in their field. If they were to change places, the lack of skills would present an obstacle, but the lack of understanding of terms, how they are used, and what they mean would also severely limit their effectiveness. Those terms and how they are used are learned over time and through interaction. While a textbook can help, it cannot demonstrate use in live interactions. Cultures are dynamic systems that reflect the communication process itself.

Cultures celebrate heroes, denigrate villains, and have specific ways of completing jobs and tasks. In business and industry, the emphasis may be on effectiveness and efficiency, but the practice can often be "because that is the way we have always done it." Rituals serve to guide our performance and behavior and may be limited to small groups or celebrated across the entire company. A pink Cadillac has a special meaning for a Mary Kay cosmetics representative. How that car is received is ritualistic, recognizing current success while honoring past performances across the company.

Rituals can serve to bind a group together, or to constrain it. Institutions tend to formalize processes and then have a hard time adapting to new circumstances. While the core values or mission statement may hold true, the method of doing things that worked in the past may not be as successful as it once was. Adaptation and change can be difficult for individuals and companies, and yet all communities, cultures, and communication contexts are dynamic, or always changing. As much as we might like things to stay the same, they will always change—and we will change with (and be changed by) them.

Divergent Cultural Characteristics

We are not created equal. We are born light- or dark-skinned, to parents of education or parents without access to education, and we grow up short or tall, slender or stocky. Our life chances or options are in many ways determined by our birth. The Victorian "rags to riches" novels that Horatio Alger wrote promoted the ideal that individuals can overcome all obstacles, raising themselves up by their bootstraps. Some people do have amazing stories, but even if you are quick to point out that Microsoft founder Bill Gates became fabulously successful despite his lack of a college education, know that his example is exception, not the rule. We all may use the advantages of our circumstances to improve our lives, but the type and extent of those advantages vary greatly across the planet.

Cultures reflect this inequality, this diversity, and the divergent range of values, symbols, and meanings across communities. Can you tie a knot? Perhaps you can tie your shoes, but can you tie a knot to secure a line to a boat, to secure a heavy load on a cart or truck, or to bundle a bale of hay? You may not be able to, but if you were raised in a culture that place a high value on knot-tying for specific purposes, you would learn that which your community values. We all have viewpoints, but they are shaped by our interactions with our communities. Let's examine several points of divergence across cultures.

Individualistic versus Collectivist Cultures

People in individualistic cultures value individual freedom and personal independence, and cultures always have stories to reflect their values. You may recall the story of Superman, or John McLean in the Diehard series, and note how one person overcomes all obstacles. Through personal ingenuity, in spite of challenges, one person rises successfully to conquer or vanquish those obstacles. Sometimes there is an assist, as in basketball or football, where another person lends a hand, but still the story repeats itself again and again, reflecting the cultural viewpoint.

The Dutch researcher Geert Hofstede explored the concepts of individualism and collectivism across diverse cultures (Hofstede, G., 1982; Hofstede, G., 2001; Hofstede, G., 2005). He found that in individualistic cultures like the United States, people perceived their world primarily from their own viewpoint. They perceived themselves as empowered individuals, capable of making their own decisions, and able to make an impact on their own lives.

This may be in contrast with collectivist cultures (Hofstede, G., 1982) who tend to focus on the needs of the nation, community, or group of workers. How does someone raised in a culture that emphasizes the community interact with someone raised in a primarily individualistic culture? How could tensions be expressed and how might interactions be influenced by this point of divergence?

Explicit-Rule Cultures versus Implicit-Rule Cultures

Do you know the rules of your business or organization? Did you learn them from an employee manual or by observing the conduct of others? Your response may include both options, but not all cultures communicate rules in the same way. Carley Dodd discusses this difference and has found quite a range of differences. In an explicit-rule culture, where rules are clearly communicated so that everyone is aware of them, the guidelines and agenda for a meeting are announced prior to the gathering. In an implicit-rule culture, where rules are often understood and communicated nonverbally, there may be no agenda. Everyone knows why they are gathered and what role each member plays, even though the expectations may not be clearly stated. Power, status, and behavioral expectations may all be understood, and to the person from outside this culture, it may prove a challenge to understand the rules of the context.

Outsiders often communicate their "otherness" by not knowing where to stand, when to sit, or how to initiate a conversation if the rules are not clearly stated. While it may help to know that implicit-rule cultures are often more tolerant of deviation from the understood rules, the newcomer will be wise to learn by observing quietly—and to do as much research ahead of the event as possible.

Uncertainty-Accepting Cultures versus Uncertainty-Rejecting Cultures

When we meet each other for the first time, we often use what we have previously learned to understand our current context. We also do this to reduce our uncertainty. Some cultures, such as the United States and Britain, are highly tolerant of uncertainty, while others go to great lengths to reduce the element of surprise. Cultures in the Arab world, for example, are high in uncertainty avoidance; they tend to be resistant to change and reluctant to take risks. Whereas a U.S. business negotiator might enthusiastically agree to try a new procedure, the Egyptian counterpart would likely refuse to get involved until all the details are worked out.

Charles Berger and Richard Calabrese developed uncertainty reduction theory to examine this dynamic aspect of communication. Here are seven axioms of uncertainty:

1. There is a high level of uncertainty at first. As we get to know one another, our verbal communication increases and our uncertainty begins to decrease.
2. Following verbal communication, nonverbal communication increases, uncertainty continues to decrease, and more nonverbal displays of affiliation, like nodding one's head to indicate agreement, will start to be expressed.
3. When experiencing high levels of uncertainty, we tend to increase our information-seeking behavior, perhaps asking questions to gain more insight. As our understanding increases, uncertainty decreases, as does the information-seeking behavior.
4. When experiencing high levels of uncertainty, the communication interaction is not as personal or intimate. As uncertainty is reduced, intimacy increases.
5. When experiencing high levels of uncertainty, communication will feature more reciprocity, or displays of respect. As uncertainty decreases, reciprocity may diminish.
6. Differences between people increase uncertainty, while similarities decrease it.
7. Higher levels of uncertainty are associated with a decrease in the indication of liking the other person, while reductions in uncertainty are associated with liking the other person more.

Time Orientation

Edward T. Hall and Mildred Reed Hall state that monochronic time-oriented cultures consider one thing at a time, whereas polychronic time-oriented cultures schedule many things at one time, and time is considered in a more fluid sense. In monochromatic time, interruptions are to be avoided, and everything has its own specific time. Even the multitasker from a monochromatic culture will, for example, recognize the value of work first before play or personal time. The United States, Germany, and Switzerland are often noted as countries that value a monochromatic time orientation.

Polychromatic time looks a little more complicated, with business and family mixing with dinner and dancing. Greece, Italy, Chile, and Saudi Arabia are countries where one can observe this perception of time; business meetings may be scheduled at a fixed time, but when they actually begin may be another story. Also, note that the dinner invitation for 8 p.m. may in reality be more like 9 p.m. If you were to show up on time, you might be the first person to arrive and find that the hosts are not quite ready to receive you.

When in doubt, always ask what is appropriate; many people from polychromatic cultures will be used to foreigner's tendency to be punctual, even compulsive, about respecting established times for events. The skilled business communicator is aware of this difference and takes steps to anticipate it. The value of time in different cultures is expressed in many ways, and your understanding can help you communicate more effectively.

Short-Term versus Long-Term Orientation

Do you want your reward right now or can you dedicate yourself to a long-term goal? You may work in a culture whose people value immediate results and grow impatient when those results do not materialize. Geert Hofstede discusses this relationship of time orientation to a culture as a "time horizon," and it underscores the perspective of the individual within a cultural context. Many countries in Asia, influenced by the teachings of Confucius, value a long-term orientation, whereas other countries, including the United States, have a more short-term approach to life and results. Native American cultures are known for holding a long-term orientation, as illustrated by the proverb attributed to the Iroquois that decisions require contemplation of their impact seven generations removed.

If you work within a culture that has a short-term orientation, you may need to place greater emphasis on reciprocation of greetings, gifts, and rewards. For example, if you send a thank-you note the morning after being treated to a business dinner, your host will appreciate your promptness. While there may be a respect for tradition, there is also an emphasis on personal representation and honor, a reflection of identity and integrity. Personal stability and consistency are also valued in a short-term oriented culture, contributing to an overall sense of predictability and familiarity.

Long-term orientation is often marked by persistence, thrift and frugality, and an order to relationships based on age and status. A sense of shame for the family and community is also observed across generations. What an individual does reflects on the family and is carried by immediate and extended family members.

Masculine versus Feminine Orientation

There was a time when many cultures and religions valued a female figurehead, and with the rise of Western cultures we have observed a shift toward a masculine ideal. Each carries with it a set of cultural expectations and norms for gender behavior and gender roles across life, including business.

Hofstede describes the masculine-feminine dichotomy not in terms of whether men or women hold the power in a given culture, but rather the extent to which that culture values certain traits that may be considered masculine or feminine. Thus, "the assertive pole has been called 'masculine' and the modest, caring pole 'feminine.' The women in feminine countries have the same modest, caring values as the men; in the masculine countries they are somewhat assertive and competitive, but not as much as the men, so that these countries show a gap between men's values and women's values" (Hofstede, G., 2009).

We can observe this difference in where people gather, how they interact, and how they dress. We can see it during business negotiations, where it may make an important difference in the success of the organizations involved. Cultural expectations precede the interaction, so someone who doesn't match those expectations may experience tension. Business in the United States has a masculine orientation—assertiveness and competition are highly valued. In other cultures, such as Sweden, business values are more attuned to modesty (lack of self-promotion) and taking care of society's weaker members. This range of difference is one aspect of intercultural communication that requires significant attention when the business communicator enters a new environment.

Direct versus Indirect

In the United States, business correspondence is expected to be short and to the point. "What can I do for you?" is a common question when a business person receives a call from a stranger; it is an accepted way of asking the caller to state his or her business. In some cultures it is quite appropriate to make direct personal observation, such as "You've changed your hairstyle," while for others it may be observed, but never spoken of in polite company. In indirect cultures, such as those in Latin America, business conversations may start with discussions of the weather, or family, or topics other than business as the partners gain a sense of each other, long before the topic of business is raised. Again, the skilled business communicator researches the new environment before entering it, as a social faux pas, or error, can have a significant impact.

Materialism versus Relationships

Does the car someone drives say something about them? You may consider that many people across the planet do not own a vehicle and that a car or truck is a statement of wealth. But beyond that, do the make and model reflect their personality? If you are from a materialistic culture, you may be inclined to say yes. If you are from a culture that values relationships rather than material objects, you may say no or focus on how the vehicle serves the family. From rocks that display beauty and wealth—what we call jewelry—to what you eat—will it be lobster ravioli or prime rib?—we express our values and cultural differences with our purchase decisions.

Members of a materialistic culture place emphasis on external goods and services as a representation of self, power, and social rank. If you consider the plate of food before you, and consider the labor required to harvest the grain, butcher the animal, and cook the meal, you are focusing more on the relationships involved with its production than the foods themselves. Caviar may be a luxury, and it may communicate your ability to acquire and offer a delicacy, but it also represents an effort. Cultures differ in how they view material objects and their relationship to them, and some value people and relationships more than the objects themselves. The United States and Japan are often noted as materialistic cultures, while many Scandinavian nations feature cultures that place more emphasis on relationships.

Low-Power versus High-Power Distance

How comfortable are you with critiquing your boss's decisions? If you are from a low-power distance culture, your answer might be "no problem." In low-power distance cultures, according to Hofstede, people relate to one another more as equals and less as a reflection of dominant or subordinate roles, regardless of their actual formal roles as employee and manager, for example.

In a high-power distance culture, you would probably be much less likely to challenge the decision, to provide an alternative, or to give input. If you are working with people from a high-power distance culture, you may need to take extra care to elicit feedback and involve them in the discussion because their cultural framework may preclude their participation. They may have learned that less powerful people must accept decisions without comment, even if they have a concern or know there is a significant problem. Unless you are sensitive to cultural orientation and power distance, you may lose valuable information.

Professionalism

What is professionalism? A profession is an occupation that involves mastery of complex knowledge and skills through prolonged training, education, or practical experience. Becoming a member of a specific profession doesn't happen overnight. Whether you seek to be a public relations expert, lawyer, doctor, teacher, welder, or electrician, each profession requires interested parties to invest themselves in learning to become a professional or a member of a profession who earns their living through specified expert activity. It's much easier to define the terms "profession" and "professional" than it is to define the term "professionalism" because each profession will have its take on what it means to be a professional within a given field.

According to the United States Department of Labor,[1] professionalism "does not mean wearing a suit or carrying a briefcase; rather, it means conducting oneself with responsibility, integrity, accountability, and excellence. It means communicating effectively and appropriately and always finding a way to be productive." The U.S. Department of Labor's book Skills to Pay the Bills: Mastering Soft Skills for Workplace Success goes on to note:

Professionalism isn't one thing; it's a combination of qualities. A professional employee arrives on time for work and manages time effectively. Professional workers take responsibility for their own behavior and work effectively with others. High-quality work standards, honesty, and integrity are also part of the package. Professional employees look clean and neat and dress appropriately for the job. Communicating effectively and appropriately for the workplace is also an essential part of professionalism.[2]

Professional Communication

As you can see here, professionalism isn't a single "thing" that can be labeled. Instead, professionalism refers to the aims and behaviors that demonstrate an individual's level of competence expected by a professional within a given profession. By the word "aims," we mean that someone who exhibits professionalism is guided by a set of goals in a professional setting. Whether the aim is to complete a project on time or help ensure higher quarterly incomes for their organization, professionalism involves striving to help one's organization achieve specific goals. By "behaviors," we mean specific ways of behaving and communicating within an organizational environment. Some common behaviors can include acting ethically, respecting others, collaborating effectively, taking personal and professional responsibility, and using language professionally. Let's look at each of these separately.

Ethics

Every year there are lapses in ethical judgment by organizations and organizational members. For our purposes, let's look at ethical lapses in 2017 and 2018.

1. We saw aviation police officers drag a bloodied pulmonologist off a plane when he wouldn't give up his seat on United Airlines.
2. We saw the beginnings of the #MeToo movement in October 2017 after Alyssa Milano uses the hashtag in response to actor Ashley Judd accusing media mogul Harvey Weinstein of serious sexual misconduct in an article within The New York Times. Since that critical moment, many courageous victims of sexual violence have raised their voices to take on the male elites in our society who had gotten away with these behaviors for decades.
3. Facebook (among others) was found to have accepted advertisements indirectly paid for by the Kremlin that influenced the 2016 election. The paid advertisements constituted a type of cyber warfare.
4. Equifax had a data breach that affected 145 million people (mostly U.S. citizens as well as some British and Canadian customers) and didn't publicly disclose this for two months.
5. The head of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Scott Pruitt, committed many ethical lapses during his tenure with the agency prompting his resignation. Some of the ethical lapses included ordering raises for two aides even when White House rejected them, spending $3.5 million (twice times as much as his predecessor) on taxpayer-funded security, using that security to pick up his favorite moisturizing lotion and dry-cleaning, renting a room from a lobbyist who had dealings with the EPA for $50 per night, installing a $43,000 private phone booth in his office that allegedly was used once, spending $124,000 on first-class flights,

purchasing two season-ticket seats at a University of Kentucky basketball game from a billionaire coal executive, tried to use his position to get his wife a Chick-fil-A franchise, and others.

Sadly, these ethical lapses are still frequent in corporate America, and they often come with huge lawsuit settlements and jail time.

The word "ethics" actually is derived from the Greek word ethos, which means the nature or disposition of a culture. From this perspective, ethics then involves the moral center of a culture that governs behavior. Without getting too deep, let's just say that philosophers debate the very nature of ethics, and they have described a wide range of different philosophical perspectives on what constitutes ethics. For our purposes, ethics is the judgmental attachment to whether something is good, right, or just.

In the business world, we often talk about business ethics, which involves things like not stealing from a company; not lying to one's boss, coworkers, customers, or clients; not taking bribes, payoffs, or kickbacks; not taking credit for someone else's work; not abusing and belittling someone in the workplace; or simply letting other people get away with unethical behavior. For example, if you know your organization has a zero-tolerance policy for workplace discrimination and you know that one supervisor is purposefully not hiring pregnant women because "they'll just be leaving on maternity leave soon anyway," then you are just as responsible as that supervisor. We might also add that discriminating against someone who is pregnant or can get pregnant is also a violation of Equal Employment Opportunity law, so you can see that often the line between ethics and rules (or laws) can be blurred.

From a communication perspective, there are also ethical issues that you should be aware of. W. Charles Redding, the "father" of organizational communication, breaks down unethical organizational communication into six specific categories (Table 13.1).[4]

Reprinted with permission from Wrench, Punyanunt, and Ward's book Organizational Communication: Theory, Practice, and Research (2014, Flat World Knowledge)
Table 13.1. Redding's Typology of Unethical Communication

An organizational communication act is unethical if it is…	Such organizational communication unethically…
coercive	• abuses power or authority • unjustifiably invades others' autonomy • stigmatizes dissents • restricts freedom of speech • refuses to listen • uses rules to stifle discussion and complaints
destructive	• attacks others' self-esteem, reputations, or feelings • disregards other's values • engages in insults, innuendoes, epithets, or derogatory jokes • uses put-downs, backstabbing, and character assassination • employs so-called "truth" as a weapon • violates confidentiality and privacy to gain an advantage • withholds constructive feedback
deceptive	• willfully perverts the truth to deceive, cheat, or defraud • sends evasive or deliberately misleading or ambiguous messages • employs bureaucratic euphemisms to cover up the truth
intrusive	• uses hidden cameras • taps telephones • employs computer technologies to monitor employee behavior • disregards legitimate privacy rights
secretive	• uses silence and unresponsiveness • hoards information • hides wrongdoing or ineptness
manipulative/exploitative	• uses demagoguery • gains compliance by exploiting fear, prejudice, or ignorance • patronizes or is condescending toward others

As you can see, unethical organizational communication is an area many people do not overly consider.

Respect for Others

Our second category related to professionalism is respecting others. In Disney's 1942 movie, Bambi, Thumper sees the young Bambi learning to walk, which leads to the following interaction with his mother:

Thumper: He doesn't walk very good, does he?

Mrs. Rabbit: Thumper!

Thumper: Yes, Mama?

Mrs. Rabbit: What did your father tell you this morning?

Thumper: If you can't say something nice, don't say nothing at all.

Sadly, many people exist in the modern workplace that need a refresher in respect from Mrs. Rabbit today. From workplace bullying to sexual harassment, many people simply do not always treat people with dignity and respect in the workplace. So, what do we mean by treating someone with respect? There are a lot of behaviors one can engage in that are respectful if you're interacting with coworkers, leaders, or followers.

Here's a list of respectful behaviors for workplace interactions:

- Be courteous, polite, and kind to everyone.
- Do not criticize or nitpick at little inconsequential things.
- Do not engage in patronizing or demeaning behaviors.
- Don't engage in physically hostile body language.
- Don't roll your eyes when your coworkers are talking.
- Don't use an aggressive tone of voice when talking with coworkers.
- Encourage coworkers to express opinions and ideas.
- Encourage your coworkers to demonstrate respect to each other as well.
- Listen to your coworkers openly without expressing judgment before they've finished speaking.
- Listen to your coworkers without cutting them off or speaking over them.
- Make sure you treat all of your coworkers fairly and equally.

• Make sure your facial expressions are appropriate and not aggressive.
• Never engage in verbally aggressive behavior: insults, name-calling, rumor mongering, disparaging,
and putting people or their ideas down.
• Praise your coworkers more often than you criticize them. Point out when they're doing great
things, not just when they're doing "wrong" things.
• Provide an equal opportunity for all coworkers to provide insight and input during meetings.
• Treat people the same regardless of age, gender, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, etc.
• When expressing judgment, focus on criticizing ideas, and not the person.

Unbiased Language

Now that we've looked a wide range of ways that you can show your respect for your coworkers, we would be remiss if we didn't bring up one specific area where you can demonstrate respect: the language we use. In a recent meeting, one of our coauthors was reporting on some work that was being completed on campus and let people in the meeting know that some people were already "grandfathered in" to the pre-existing process. Without really intending to, our coauthor had used gendered language. One of the other people in the room quickly quipped, "or grandmothered." Upon contemplation, our coauthor realized that the seemingly innocuous use of the phrase "grandfathered in," which admittedly is very common, is one that has a gendered connotation that limits it to males. Even though our coauthor's purpose had never been to engage in sexist language, the English language is filled with sexist language examples, and they come all too quickly to many of us because of tradition and the way we were taught the language. This experience was a perfect reminder for our coauthor about the importance of thinking about sexist and biased language and how it impacts the workplace. Table 13.2 is a list of common sexist or biased language and corresponding inclusive terms that one could use instead.

Table 13.2. Replacing Sexist or Biased Language with Inclusive Terms

Sexist or Biased Language	Inclusive Term
cancer victim; AIDS victim	cancer patient; person living with AIDS
chairman	chairperson or chair
confined to a wheelchair	uses a wheelchair
congressman	congressperson
Eskimo	Inuit or Aleut
fireman	firefighters
freshman	first-year student
Indian (when referring to U.S. indigenous peoples)	Native American or specific tribe
policeman	police officer
man or mankind	people, humanity, or the human race
man hours	working hours
man-made	manufactured, machine made, or synthetic
manpower	personnel or workforce
Negro or colored	African American or Black
old people or elderly	senior citizens, mature adults, older adults
Oriental	Asian, Asian American, or specific country of origin
postman or mailman	postal worker or mail carrier
steward or stewardess	flight attendant
suffers from diabetes	has diabetes; person living with diabetes
to man	to operate; to staff; to cover
waiter or waitress	server

> We live in a world where respect and bias are not always acknowledged in the workplace setting. Sadly, despite decades of anti-discrimination legislation and training, we know this is still a problem. Women, minorities, and other non-dominant groups are still woefully underrepresented in a broad range of organizational positions, from management to CEO. Some industries are better than others, but this problem is still very persistent in the United States. Most of us mindlessly participate in these systems without even being consciously aware. Byron Lee puts it this way: Our brains rapidly categorize people using both obvious and subtler characteristics, and also automatically assign an unconscious evaluation (eg good or bad) and an emotional tone (ie. pleasant, neutral or unpleasant) with this memory. Importantly, because these unconscious processes happen without awareness, control, intention or effort, everyone, no matter how fair-minded we might think we are, is unconsciously biased.

These unconscious biases often lead us to engage in microaggressions against people we view as "other." Microaggressions are "the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership."6 Notice that microaggressions can be targeted at women, minorities, and other non-dominant groups. Research has shown us that these unconscious biases effect everything from perceptions of hire ability, to job promotions, to determining who gets laid off, and so many other areas within the workplace.

Byron Lee has devised a five-point strategy for engaging in mindful intercultural interactions:

1. Preparing for your interpersonal encounter by recognizing and gently observing preconceptions, biases, emotions, and sensations as part of your ongoing internal experience (Nonjudging). Bringing into awareness an intention to connect (Presence).
2. Beginning your conversation by remaining open to hear whatever the person may bring (Acceptance), and a willingness to get close to and understand another's suffering (Empathic Concern).
3. Bringing a kindly curiosity to your own internal experience and to the experiences shared by the other person throughout the encounter (Beginner's Mind).
4. Noticing and letting go of your urge to "fix" the "problem" (Non-striving) and letting the process unfold in its own time (Patience).
5. The collaborative interaction concludes when you mutually reach a way forward that reflects the other person's world view and needs (Compassionate Action), and not your own (Letting Go).[7]

For this activity, we want you to explore some of your own unconscious biases. To start, go to the Implicit Association Test (IAT) website run by Project Implicit. On their website, you'll find several tests that examine your unconscious or implicit biases towards various groups. Complete a couple of these tests and then ponder what your results say about your own unconscious biases. After completing the tests, answer the following questions:

1. Were you surprised by your scores on the IATs? Why?
2. How do you think your own implicit biases impact how you interact with others interpersonally?
3. How can you be more mindful of your interactions with people from different groups in the future?

Personal Responsibility

Let's face it; we all make mistakes. Making mistakes is a part of life. Personal responsibility refers to an individual's willingness to be accountable for what they feel, think, and behave. Whether we're talking about our attitudes, our thought processes, or physical and communicative behaviors, personal responsibility is simply realizing that we are in the driver's seat and not blaming others for our current circumstances. Now, this is not to say that there are never external factors that impede our success. Of course, there are. This is not to say that certain people have advantages in life because of a privileged background; of course, some people have. However, personal responsibility involves differentiating between those things we can control and those things that are outside of our control. For example, I may not be able to control a coworker who decides to yell at me, but I can control how I feel about that coworker, how I think about that coworker, and how I choose to respond to that coworker. Here are some ways that you can take personal responsibility in your own life (or in the workplace):

- Acknowledge that you are responsible for your choices in the workplace.
- Acknowledge that you are responsible for how you feel at work.
- Acknowledge that you are responsible for your behaviors at work.
- Accept that your choices are yours alone, so you can't blame someone else for them.
- Accept that your sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem are yours.
- Accept that you can control your stress and feelings of burnout.
- Decide to invest in your self-improvement.
- Decide to take control of your attitudes, thoughts, and behaviors.
- Decide on specific professional goals and make an effort and commitment to accomplish those goals.

Although you may have the ability to take responsibility for your feelings, thoughts, and behaviors, not everyone in the workplace will do the same. Most of us will come in contact with coworkers who do not take personal responsibility. Dealing with coworkers who have a million and one excuses can be frustrating and demoralizing.

Excuse-making occurs any time an individual attempts to shift the blame for an individual's behavior from reasons more central to the individual to sources outside of their control in the attempt to make themselves look better and more in control.[8] For example, an individual may explain their tardiness to work by talking about how horrible the traffic was on the way to work instead of admitting that they slept in late and left the house late. People make excuses because they fear that revealing the truth would make them look bad or out of control. In this example, waking up late and leaving the house late is the fault of the individual, but they blame the traffic to make themselves look better and in control even though they were late.

Excuse-making happens in every facet of life, but excuse-making in the corporate world can be highly problematic. For example, research has shown that when front-line service providers engage in excuse-making, they are more likely to lose return customers as a result.[9] In one study, when salespeople attempted to excuse their lack of ethical judgment by pointing to their customers' lack of ethics, supervisors tended to punish more severely those who engaged in excuse-making than those who had not.[10] Of course, even an individual's peers can become a little annoyed (or downright disgusted) by a colleague who always has a handy excuse for their behavior. For this reason, Amy Nordrum recommends using the ERROR method when handling a situation where your behavior was problematic: Empathy, Responsibility, Reason, Offer Reassurance.[11] Here is an example Nordrum uses to illustrate the ERROR method:

> I hate that you [burden placed on person] because of me (Empathy). I should have thought things out better (Responsibility), but I got caught up in [reason for behavior] (Reason). Next time I'll [preventative action] (Offer Reassurance).

As you can see, the critical parts of this response involve validating the other person, taking responsibility, and providing an explanation for how you'll behave in the future to avoid similar problems.

Language Use

In the workplace, the type of language and how we use language is essential. In a 2016 study conducted by PayScale,12 researchers surveyed 63,924 managers. According to these managers, the top three hard skills that new college graduates lack are writing proficiency (44%), public speaking (39%), and data analysis (36%). The top three soft skills new college graduates lack are critical thinking/problemsolving (60%), attention to detail (56%), and communication (46%). One of the most important factors of professionalism in today's workplace is effective written and oral communication. From the moment someone sends in a resume with a cover letter, their language skills are being evaluated, so knowing how to use both formal language and jargon or specialized language effectively is paramount for success in the workplace.

Formal Language

Formal language is a specific writing and spoken style that adheres to strict conventions of grammar. This is in contrast to informal language, which is more common when we speak. In the workplace, there are reasons why someone would use both formal and informal language. Table 13.3 provides examples of formal and informal language choices.

Table 13.3 Formal and Informal Language Choices

Characteristic	**Informal**	**Formal**
Contraction	I *won't be* attending the meeting on Friday.	I *will not* be attending the meeting on Friday.
Phrasal Verbs	The report *spelled out* the need for more resources.	The report *illustrated* the need for more resources.
Slang/Colloquialism	The *nosedive* in our quarterly earnings *came out of left field.*	The *downturn* in our quarterly earnings *was unexpected.*
First-Person Pronouns	*I considered* numerous research methods before deciding to use an employee satisfaction survey.	*Numerous research methods were considered* before deciding to use an employee satisfaction survey.

As you can see from Table 13.3, formal language is less personal and more professional in tone than informal language. Some key factors of formal language include complex sentences, use of full words, and the third person. Informal language, on the other hand, is more colloquial or common in tone; it contains simple, direct sentences; uses contractions and abbreviations, and allows for a more personal approach that includes emotional displays. For people entering the workplace, learning how to navigate both formal and informal language is very beneficial because different circumstances will call for both in the workplace. If you're writing a major report for shareholders, then knowing how to use formal language is very important. On the other hand, if you're a PR professional speaking on behalf of an organization, speaking to the media using formal language could make you (and your organization) look distant and disconnected, so using informal language might help in this case.

Use of Jargon and Specialized Language

Every industry is going to be filled with specialized jargon, or the specialized or technical language particular to a specific profession, occupation, or group that is either meaningless to outsiders or difficult for them to understand. For example, if I informed you that we conducted a "factor analysis with a varimax rotation," most of your heads would immediately start to spin. However, those of us who study human communication from a quantitative or statistical perspective, we know what that phrase means because we learned it during our training in graduate school. If you walked into a hospital and heard an Emergency Department (ED) physician referring to the GOMER in bay 9, most of you would be equally perplexed. Every job has some jargon, so part of being a professional is learning the jargon within your industry and peripherally related sectors as well. For example, if you want to be a pharmaceutical sales representative, learning some of the jargon of an ED (notice they're not called Emergency Rooms [ERs] anymore). Trust us, watching the old television show ER isn't going to help you learn this jargon very well either.[13] Instead, you have to spend time within an organization or field to pick up the necessary jargon. However, you can start this process as an undergraduate by joining student groups associated with specific fields. If you want to learn the jargon of public relations, join the Public Relations Student Society of America. If you want to go into training and development, becoming a student member of the Association for Talent Development. Want to go into nonprofit work, become a member of the Association for Volunteer Administration or the Young Nonprofit Professionals Network. If you do not have a student chapter of one of these groups on your campus, then find a group on LinkedIn or another social networking site aimed at professionals. One of the great things about modern social networking is the ability to watch professionals engaging in professional dialogue virtually. By watching the discussions in LinkedIn groups, you can start to pick up on the major issues of a field and some of the everyday jargon.

Key Takeaways

- All cultures have characteristics such as initiations, traditions, history, values and principles, purpose, symbols, and boundaries.
- Cultures have distinct orientations when it comes to rules, uncertainty, time and time horizon, masculinity, directness, materialism, and power distance.
- A profession is an occupation that involves mastery of complex knowledge and skills through prolonged training, education, or practical experience. Professionalism, on the other hand, involves the aims and behaviors that demonstrate an individual's level of competence expected by a professional within a given profession.
- The term ethics is defined as the judgmental attachment to whether something is good, right, or just. In our society, there have been several notable ethical lapses, including those by such companies as United Airlines, Facebook, Equifax, and the Environmental Protection Agency. Starting in fall 2017, the #MeToo movement started shining a light on a wide range of ethical issues involving the abuse of one's power to achieve sexual desires in the entertainment industry. This movement has raised awareness and legal action against a broad range of individuals who had previously gotten away with the illegal behavior in the workplace.
- Respecting our coworkers is one of the most

essential keys to developing a positive organizational experience. There are many simple things we can do to show our respect, but one crucial feature is thinking about the types of langue we use. Avoid using language that is considered biased and marginalizing.

- Personal responsibility refers to an individual's willingness to be accountable for what they feel, think, and behave. Part of being a successful coworker is taking responsibility for your behaviors, communication, and task achievement in the workplace.
- Formal language is specific writing and spoken style that adheres to strict conventions of grammar. Conversely, informal language is more colloquial or common in tone; it contains simple, direct sentences; uses contractions and abbreviations, and allows for a more personal approach that includes emotional displays.

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8.3 Giving and Receiving Feedback

Receiving Formal Feedback

Many are not born with a love of receiving feedback. However, you can *learn* to love receiving feedback. Receiving feedback is a wonderful way to truly learn about yourself and grow into the person you want to be.

Joe Hrisch helps us all see The Joy of Getting Feedback in his Ted Talk below.

https://youtube.com/watch?v=h4zNEl7XgXI%3Ffeature%3Doembed%26rel%3D0

Some guidelines for learning to love receiving feedback.

Be Open and Accept Someone Else's Perspective – In order for someone's feedback to help you grow and develop personally and professionally, you must be open to hearing and accepting what they have to say.

Embrace the Discomfort – Receiving feedback can be uncomfortable, accepting that, and embracing it allows you to get the most of out of the feedback someone gives you.

Ask for More Information, Examples, and Clarifying Questions – Don't hesitate to dig into the feedback. Ask questions to make sure that you understand the feedback, that you get really clear about how you can improve, and seek out examples of where you do great and where you have room for improvement.

Remember – Feedback Doesn't Mean You Suck – Everyone has something to improve upon. Having someone in your life willing to give you feedback and help you grow is a privilege. Embrace the feedback, don't take it personally or to heart as a reflection that you are terrible at your job or a terrible person. Feedback is simply an opportunity to grow and improve who you are.

Giving Formal Feedback to Yourself

Don't forget, you can also give yourself feedback. Self-evaluation can be difficult, because people may think their performance was effective and therefore doesn't need critique, or they may become their own worst critic, which can negatively affect self-efficacy. The key to effective self-evaluation is to identify strengths and weaknesses, to evaluate yourself within the context of the task, and to set concrete goals for future performance. What follows are guidelines that I give my students for self-evaluation of their speeches.

Identify strengths and weaknesses. We have a tendency to be our own worst critics, so steer away from nit-picking or over focusing on one aspect of your performance that really annoys you and sticks out to you. It is likely that the focus of your criticism wasn't nearly as noticeable or even noticed at all by others. For example, I once had a student write a self-critique of which about 90 percent focused on how his face looked red. Although that was really salient for him when he watched his video, I don't think it was a big deal for the audience members.

Evaluate yourself within a context. If you are asked to speak about your personal life in a creative way, don't spend the majority of your self-evaluation critiquing your use of gestures. People have a tendency to overanalyze certain aspects of their performance, which usually only accounts for a portion of their overall effectiveness or productiveness, and underanalyze other elements that have significant importance.

Set goals for next time. Goal setting is important because most of us need a concrete benchmark against which to evaluate our progress. Once goals are achieved, they can be "checked off" and added to our ongoing skill set, which can enhance confidence and lead to the achievement of more advanced goals.

Revisit goals and assess progress at regular intervals. We will not always achieve the goals we set, so it is important to revisit the goals periodically to assess our progress. If you did not meet a goal, figure out why and create an action plan to try again. If you did achieve a goal, try to build on that confidence to meet future goals.

Giving Formal Feedback to Others

The ability to give effective feedback benefits oneself and others. Whether in professional or personal contexts, positive verbal and nonverbal feedback can boost others' confidence, and negative feedback, when delivered constructively, can provide important perception checking and lead to improvements. Of course, negative feedback that is not delivered competently can lead to communication difficulties that can affect a person's self-esteem and self-efficacy.

It is likely that you will be asked at some point to give feedback to another person in a personal, academic, professional, or civic context. As schools, companies, and organizations have moved toward more team-based environments over the past twenty years, peer evaluations are now commonly used to help assess performance. I, for example, am evaluated every year by my students, and my two faculty directors. I also evaluate my faculty and teaching assistants and peers yearly. Since it's important for us to know how to give competent and relevant feedback, and since the feedback can be useful for the self-improvement of the receiver, many students are asked to complete peer evaluations verbally and/or in writing for classmates after they deliver a speech or work on a project together. The key to good feedback is to offer constructive criticism, which consists of comments that are specific and descriptive enough for the receiver to apply them for the purpose of self-improvement. The following are guidelines for giving feedback.

1. **Be specific and descriptive.** I often see a lack of specific comments when it comes to feedback on speech delivery. Students write things like "Eye contact" on a peer comment sheet, but neither the student nor I know what to do with the comment. While a comment like "Good eye contact" or "Not enough eye contact" is more specific, it's not descriptive enough to make it useful. What would be best is "Good consistent eye contact with the audience during your introduction. Eye contact with the audience diminished when you seemed less confident in what you were presenting in the last 3 slides of your powerpoint."
2. **Be positive.** If you are delivering your feedback in writing, pretend that you are speaking directly to the person and write it the same way. Comments like "Stop fidgeting" or "Get more sources" wouldn't likely come out during verbal feedback, because we know they sound too harsh. The same tone, however, can be communicated through written feedback. Instead, make comments that are framed in such a way as to avoid defensiveness or hurt feelings.
3. **Be constructive.** Although we want to be positive in our feedback, comments like "Good job" aren't constructive, because a communicator can't actually take that comment and do something with it. A comment like "You were able to explain our company's new marketing strategy in a way that even I, as an engineer, could make sense of. The part about our new

crisis communication plan wasn't as clear. Perhaps you could break it down the same way you did the marketing strategy to make it clearer for people like me who are outside the public relations department." This statement is positively framed, specific, and constructive because the speaker can continue to build on the positively reviewed skill by applying it to another part of the speech that was identified as a place for improvement.

4. **Be realistic.** Comments like "Don't be nervous" aren't constructive or realistic. Instead, you could say, "I know the first speech is tough, but remember that we're all in the same situation and we're all here to learn. I tried the breathing exercises discussed in the book and they helped calm my nerves. Maybe they'll work for you, too?" I've also had students make comments like "Your accent made it difficult for me to understand you," which could be true but may signal a need for more listening effort since we all technically have accents, and changing them, if possible at all, would take considerable time and effort.
5. **Be relevant.** Feedback should be relevant to the assignment, task, and/or context. I've had students give feedback like "Rad nail polish" and "Nice smile," which although meant as compliments are not relevant in formal feedback unless you're a fashion consultant or a dentist.

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