

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

A MINDFUL APPROACH TO RELATIONSHIPS



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INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION 2ND EDITION

A Mindful Approach to Relationships

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Preface



“Argentina, Women, Nora cortiñas image” by [EugenioAlbrecht](#) from [Pixabay](#)

The term “interpersonal communication” refers to messages sent and received between two people. Most of our daily lives involve interpersonal communication on some level. When many people hear the word “interpersonal,” they immediately think of intimate relationships, but this is only one small fraction of the types of interpersonal interactions we have daily. Whether we are communicating with our spouse or dating partner, communicating with a coworker, communicating with a physician or therapist, or communicating with a random stranger, we are engaging in interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication is the way people connect with other people.

William Schutz proposed three main reasons for why interpersonal communication is important to human beings in his Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientations Theory: control, inclusion, and affection.¹ The first need that is met through interpersonal relationships is our need to influence other people. People have an inherent need to control situations and the people within those situations. Whether we are talking about using persuasion attempts to get someone to go out with us on a date or using leadership skills to control what happens in the boardroom, control is a fundamental need for our interpersonal relationships. Many find the concept of ‘control’ in interpersonal relationships uncomfortable, often associating it with negative connotations. Control refers to an individual’s ability to influence another person’s behavior or ideas, especially when it is perceived as the right thing to do. Manipulation, on the other hand, is influencing another per-

son's behavior or ideas to one's own advantage, often using dishonest, unscrupulous, and insidious means. Control is neither good nor bad.

The second need we fulfill through interpersonal relationships is inclusion. Everyone wants to belong. As humans, we have an innate desire to belong to groups and social communities. At the most basic level, we belong to our families when we are born. As we age, the desire to belong to other groups we deem as positive continues. In school, we may want to belong to sports teams or social groups like a fraternity or sorority. When we enter the workforce, we want to feel like we belong in the workplace or belong within our professions by being a member of professional associations. Our need to feel like we belong is a basic need, and we fulfill this need through our daily interpersonal encounters.

The final need we fulfill through our interpersonal relationships is affection. The word "affection" stems from the Latin term *affectio*, which refers to emotions or feelings. Kory Floyd and Mark T. Morman defined "affection" as having an emotional state of fondness and positive regard toward a specific target.² Our understanding of affection is still rooted in the notions of emotion and feeling today. We all want to feel someone else's positive affection toward us, whether it's from our parents, coworkers, friends, siblings, children, etc. We also have an innate need to feel affection toward others.

These three basic human needs—control, inclusion, and affection—are essential constructs in daily life and interactions. These are central tenets of who we are as human beings. Much of our success in life is built upon these three needs, so exploring these needs and how people accomplish them effectively is very important. The interpersonal communication strategies we discuss in this book are tools. As with many tools, they can either be used to enhance people's lives or destroy them. A kind word and smile may make someone's day, but an evil glare and a cutting remark can just as quickly destroy someone's day. For this reason, we want you to consider what it means to be an ethical communicator just as much as we want you to consider how you communicate and react to others' communication with you. Please realize that the way you communicate and interact with others will impact their lives as much as it affects yours.

A Note for Students

Welcome to the world of interpersonal communication. We're happy that you're going to be joining us on this journey through the fascinating world of relationships in today's world. Besides this textbook, there's also a student workbook that we'd encourage you to download and print. You can find the workbook on the [Milne Open Textbooks website](#). The workbook has a complete outline of the entire book, a wide range of activities, 20 unique adult color pages, a 16-week course planner, and so many other features. This workbook is a companion to this textbook. And it's also available for you 100% free.

Several chapters in this text will contain information about research results, so we wanted to explain a couple of basic social scientific concepts before we jumped right into the text itself. A lot of the research in the world of interpersonal communication is based on statistics. While statistics underpin much of this research, this textbook will focus on the conceptual understanding rather than complex numerical data.

Relationships

The first statistical concept that anyone studying the social sciences must understand is statistical relationships. We don't want to get too technical in our discussion of relationships, but we want to explain some of the basic ideas. When we examine relationships, we must have scores on two different variables for a single person. Now, the word "variable" refers to anything that can vary from person to person: for example, your height, weight, public speaking anxiety, best friend relationship satisfaction, etc. There are thousands of variables that social scientists studying interpersonal communication can examine. However, we rarely examine a single variable in isolation. We're more likely to examine two or more variables.

To help us examine the idea of relationships, we're going to use an article from Melissa Wanzer and Melanie Booth-Butterfield that examine someone's "humor orientation."³ The variable "humor orientation" is measured by a survey, which you can learn more about on [Steven Booth-Butterfield's website](#). Humor orientation is the use of jokes and joking during interactions with other people. In this study, the researchers had Person 1 complete the Humor Orientation (HO) Scale (self-reported HO) and had Person 2 complete the HO about Person 1 (other-reported HO).

Positive

One of the first significant findings in this study was a positive relationship between someone's perception of another person's humor orientation (other-reported HO) and their popularity (social attractiveness). The term "positive relationship" here simply means that as someone's score on the HO measure went up (people were seen as using more jokes and joking during their interactions with others), the more popular they were viewed by other people. In a positive relationship, the opposite is also true. People who were not viewed as using jokes and joking during their interactions were considered as less popular by others. In a positive relationship, as scores on one measure go up, the scores on the other measure go up. As scores on one measure go down, then scores on the other measure go down.

Negative

The second type of relationship we find using statistics is called a negative relationship. A negative relationship occurs when scores on one variable go up and scores on the second variable go down. In the Wanzer and Booth-Butterfield study, the researchers found that people who viewed themselves as having a strong humor orientation (higher scores on the HO scale) reported lower levels of loneliness. As scores for someone's HO went up, then scores for reported loneliness went down. Again, the opposite is also true. As someone's HO went down, their scores for reported loneliness went up.

No Relationship

The last type of relationship regularly found in research by interpersonal communication scholars is no relationship between two variables. Not finding a relationship between variables means that as scores on one measure went up, the scores on the second measure didn't go up or down at all. Most interesting in the Wanzer and Booth-Butterfield study was when they found no relationship between an individual's rating of their HO (self-reported HO) and someone else's perception of

their social attractiveness (popularity). You can think you're the funniest person in the world, but it will not relate to someone else's perceptions of social attractiveness.

Note of Caution

Now that we've explained the three basic types of relationships commonly discussed in interpersonal communication research, we want to raise one seriously important point. Correlation does not equal causation. The statistical test that is used to examine relationships is called a correlation. One of the inherent limitations of a correlation is that it cannot say that X caused Y. For example, in the Wanzer and Booth-Butterfield study, we cannot say that someone's HO caused them to be viewed as more popular. All we can tell when using a correlation is that there is a relationship or that there is not a relationship between two variables.

Differences

Besides examining relationships, researchers are often highly interested in exploring what we call differences. Scholars distinguish between two types of differences: differences of kind and differences of degree.

Differences of Kind

Differences of kind are differences that exist because people fall within a specific category. A common example to illustrate this concept is the behavioral differences between cheerleaders and football players. Cheerleaders will exhibit very specific behaviors (using megaphones, dancing, being tossed into the air, yelling cheers, pumping up the audience, etc.) during a football game. Football players will exhibit a very different set of behaviors (e.g., throwing the football, running with the football, kicking the football, tackling people, etc.). When you have two groups that have very different prescribed sets of behavior, we call this a difference of kind.

Differences of Degree

The difference that social scientists are most interested in is called differences of degree. The term "degree" here means that you are looking at and comparing the scores of two different groups on a single variable. Let's take the concept of height and compare females and males. In a study completed by Max Roser, Cameron Appel, and Hannah Ritchie, the researchers examined a wide range of issues related to human height.⁴ Based on data that was gathered from 1896 until 1996, the researchers found males are taller than females. By 1996, males had an average height of 171 centimeters, while females had an average height of 159 centimeters. This difference is a difference of degree.

When discussing differences of degree, we compare the scores of two or more groups on a single outcome variable, such as height. It's crucial to understand that finding an average difference (e.g., males being taller than females) does not negate the existence of individuals who fall outside these averages, such as shorter males or taller females. Indeed, research often shows a broader range of variation within gender groups than between them. However, differences of degree specifically focus on the comparison of group averages, not individual outliers.

You’ve now learned two very important concepts related to the statistics interpersonal communication scholars commonly use.

Before we move on, it’s important to address a common misunderstanding: the tendency to confuse differences of kind with differences of degree, especially when talking about groups of people. Historically, this confusion has led to serious misjudgments. For instance, speakers of non-standard dialects are often viewed as less intelligent or less educated, as if language use marks a fundamental difference in kind. In reality, language varies by region, culture, and community—a difference of degree, not essence. These kinds of mistaken assumptions can reinforce stereotypes and overlook the complexity and richness of human variation. Recognizing whether a difference is one of kind or degree is essential for more accurate and inclusive interpersonal interactions.

A Note for Professors

We want to start by thanking you for adopting this Open Educational Resource textbook. There are many interpersonal communication textbooks available today, so we hope you find this book to be both very student-friendly and scholarly-based. Our goal with this project was to create a textbook that could compete with the costly texts currently on the market. Interpersonal communication is one of the most commonly taught courses within the field, so we realized that a massive need existed for a textbook that could be highly competitive and freely available.

If you haven’t asked for access to the instructor materials available for this book, please check out the [Milne Open Textbooks website](#) to request access. We understand that instructors’ resources are vital, so we created a comprehensive instructor’s manual that includes note outlines, activities, and a test bank. A complete set of PowerPoint presentations is also available from the publisher. We also encourage you to adopt the student workbook, which is also freely available on the publisher’s website. The student workbook is aligned with the teaching notes, which makes for a cohesive set of items.

Notes

1. Schutz, W. C. (1960). *FIRO: A three dimensional theory of interpersonal behavior*. Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
2. Floyd, K., & Morman, M. T. (1998). The measurement of affectionate communication. *Communication Quarterly*, 46(2), 144–162. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463379809370092>
3. Wanzer, M. B., & Booth-Butterfield, M. (1996). Are funny people popular? An examination of humor orientation, loneliness, and social attraction. *Communication Quarterly*, 44(1), 42–52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463379609369999>
4. Roser, M., Appel, C., & Ritchie, H. (2025, December). *Human height*. Our World in Data. <https://our-worldindata.org/human-height>

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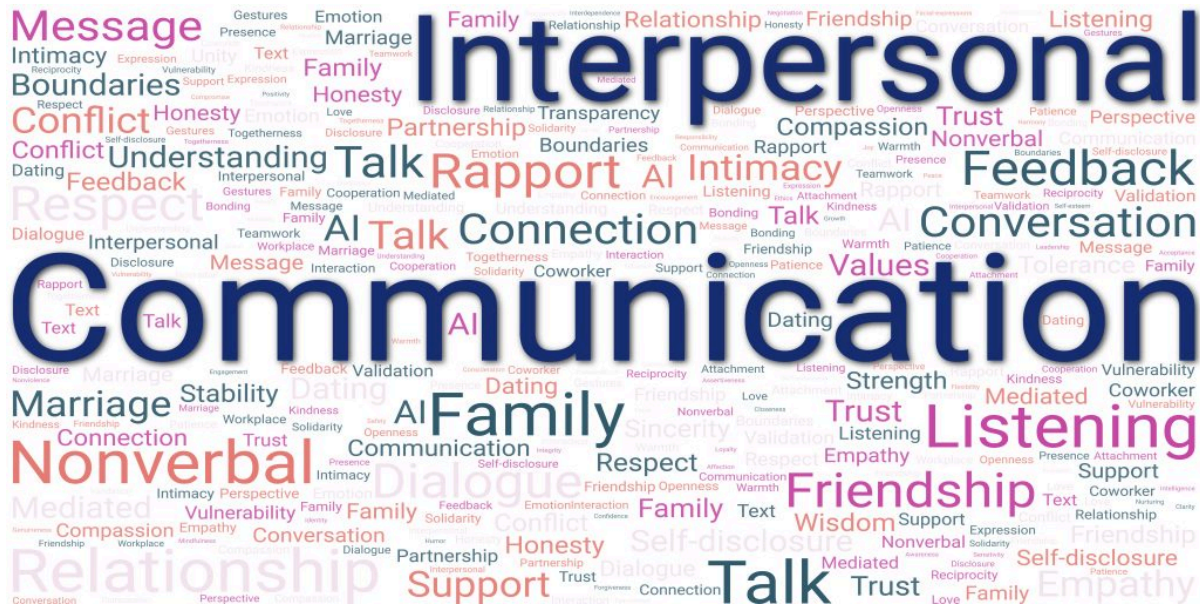
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Chapter 1: Introduction to Human Communication



Interpersonal Communication Word Cloud

If you're like most people taking their first course or reading their first book in interpersonal communication, you may wonder what you're going to be studying. Academics are notorious for not agreeing on definitions of concepts, which is also true of interpersonal communication scholars. Bochner (1989) wrote laid out the fundamental underpinnings of this academic area called "interpersonal communication," "at least two communicators; intentionally orienting toward each other; as both subject and object; whose actions embody each other's perspectives both toward self and toward other."¹ This simplistic definition of interpersonal communication frustrates many scholars because it does not provide clear parameters for the area of study beyond two people interacting. Mark Knapp and John Daly noted that four areas of contention are commonly seen in the discussion of interpersonal communication: number of communicators involved, the physical proximity of the communicators, nature of the interaction units, and degree of formality and structure.²

Number of Communicators Involved

As the definition from Bochner in the previous paragraph noted, most scholars agree that interpersonal communication involves "at least two communicators." Although a helpful tool to separate interpersonal communication from small group or organizational communication, some

scholars argue that looking specifically at one dyad is an accurate representation of interpersonal communication. For example, if you and your dating partner are talking about what a future together might look like, you cannot exclude all relational baggage that comes into that discussion. You might be influenced by your own family, friends, coworkers, and other associates. So although there may be only two people interacting at one point, there are strong influences that are happening in the background.



Interpersonal or Dyadic Communication

Physical Proximity of the Communicators

In a lot of early writing about interpersonal communication, the discussion of the importance of physical proximity was a common one. Researchers argued that interpersonal communication is a face-to-face endeavor. However, with the range of mediated technologies we have in the 21st Century, we often communicate interpersonally with people through social networking sites, text messaging, email, the phone, and a range of other technologies. Is the interaction between two lovers as they break up via text messages any less “interpersonal” than when the breakup happens face-to-

face? Proximity is interesting, but we argue that in the 21st century a lot of our interpersonal interactions use some kind of technology.

Pewresearch.org³ reports that 98% of Americans own a cell phone with about 9 out of 10 being a smart phone. In 2011, only 35% of Americans owned a cellphone. Consider the number of ways individuals can communicate using the cell phone. We can make calls, text, message on social media platforms. Which one do you use the most in interactions?

Nature of the Interaction Units

One of our primary reasons for communicating with other people is trying to understand them and how and why they communicate. As such, some messages may help us understand and predict how people will behave and communicate, so do those interactions have a higher degree of “interpersonalness?” Imagine you and your boyfriend or girlfriend just fought. You are not sure what caused the fight in the first place. During the ensuing conversation (once things have settled down), you realize that your boyfriend/girlfriend feels that when you flirt with others in public, it diminishes your relationship. Through this conversation, you learn how your behavior causes your boyfriend/girlfriend to get upset and react angrily. You now have more information about how your boyfriend/girlfriend communicates and what your behavior does to cause these types of interactions. Some would argue this type of conversation has a high degree of “interpersonalness.” If you “like” a stranger’s post on Instagram or TikTok, have you engaged in interpersonal communication? Is this minimal form of interaction even worth calling interpersonal communication?

Degree of Formality and Structure

The last sticking point that many scholars have when discussing interpersonal communication is formality and structure. A great deal of research in interpersonal communication has focused on interpersonal interactions that are informal and unstructured (e.g., friendships, romantic relationships, family interactions, etc.). However, many interpersonal interactions have a stronger degree of formality and structure associated with them. For example, you would not interact with your physician the same way you would with your romantic partner because of the formality of that relationship. We often communicate with our managers or supervisors, who exist in a formal organizational structure. In all these cases, we are still examining interpersonal relationships.

Why Study Communication?

Learning Objectives

1. Define the term *communication*.

2. Identify four basic human needs that communication helps fulfill.
3. Describe the benefits of studying communication as an academic discipline.
4. Explain how communication influences personal identity.
5. List examples of how communication affects relationships and professional interactions.

Most people think they are great communicators. However, very few people are “naturally” good. Communication takes time, skill, and practice. To be a great communicator, you must also be a great listener. It requires some proficiency and competence. Think about someone you know who is not a good communicator. Why is that person not good? Do they say things that are inappropriate, rude, or hostile? This text gives you the skills to be a better communicator.

Reasons to Study Communication

Hence, we need to study communication for a variety of reasons. First, it gives us a new perspective on something we take for granted every day. As stated earlier, most people think they are excellent communicators. However, most people never ask another person if they are great communicators. Besides being in a public speaking class or listening to your friends’ opinions, you probably do not get a lot of feedback on the quality of your communication. In this book, we will learn all about communication from different perspectives. As the saying goes, “You can’t see the forest for the trees.” You won’t be able to see the impact of your communication behaviors, if you don’t focus on certain communication aspects. The second reason we study communication is based on the amount of our time that is devoted to that activity. Think about your daily routine; I am sure that it involves communicating with others (via face-to-face, texting, electronic media, etc.). Because we spend so much of our time communicating with others, we should make that time worthwhile. We need to learn how to communicate and communicate better because a large amount of our time is allotted to communicating with others. The last reason we study communication is to increase our effectiveness. There are several reasons marriages and relationships often fail. The most popular reason is that people don’t know how to communicate with each other, which leads to irreconcilable differences. People rarely know how to work through problems, and it creates anger, hostility, and possibly violence. In these cases, communication needs to be effective for the relationship to work and be satisfying. Think about all the relationships that you have with friends, family, coworkers, and significant others. It is possible that this course could make you more successful in those relationships.

We all have specific and general reasons we communicate with others. They vary from person to person. We know we spend a large amount of our time communicating. Also, every individual will communicate with other people. Most people do not realize the value and importance of communication. Sherry Morreale and Judy Pearson believe that there are three main reasons we need to study communication.⁴ First, when you study communication behaviors, it gives you a new perspective on something you probably take for granted. Some people never realize the important phys-

iological functions until they take a class on anatomy or biology. In the same fashion, some people never understand how to communicate and why they communicate until they take a communication studies course. Second, we need to study communication because we spend much of our time communicating with other people. Gina Chen found that many people communicate online every day, and X (formerly known as Twitter) subscribers fulfill their needs of camaraderie by tweeting with others.⁵ Hence, we all need to communicate with others. Third, the most important reason is to become a better communicator. Research has shown that we need to learn to communicate better with others because none of us are very good at it.

Communication Needs

Think for a minute of all the problematic communication behaviors that you have experienced in your life: personally or professionally. You probably notice that there are areas that could use improvement. In this book, we will learn about better ways to communicate. To improve your communication behavior, you must first understand your need for communicating with others.

Physical

Studies show that there is a link between mental health and physical health. People who encounter negative experiences, but are also willing to communicate those experiences are more likely to have better mental and physical health.⁶ Ronald Adler, Lawrence Rosenfeld, and Russell Proctor found that communication has been beneficial to avoiding/decreasing:⁷

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Cancer
- Coronary problems
- Common Cold

Research clearly illustrates that communication is so vital for our physical health. Because most health problems are stress-induced, communication offers a way to relieve this tension and ease some of the physical symptoms. It is so vital for people to share what they feel, because if they keep it bottled up, then they are more likely to suffer emotionally, mentally, and physically.

Identity

Communication is not only essential for us to thrive and live. It is also important to discover who we are. From a very young age, you were probably told a variety of characteristics about your physical appearance and your personality. You might have been told that you are funny, smart, pretty, friendly, talented, or insightful. All of these comments probably came from someone else. For instance, Sally went to a store with no makeup and saw one of her close friends, Janice. Janice told Sally that she looked horrible with no makeup. So, from that day forward, Sally never walked out of the house without her cosmetics. You can see that this one comment affected Sally's behavior

and Sally's perceptions about herself. Just one comment can influence how you think, act, and feel. Think about all the comments that you have been told in your life. Were they hurtful comments or helpful comments? Did they make you stronger or weaker? You are who you are based on what others have told you about yourself and how you responded to these comments. In another contrasting example, Mark's parents told him that he wasn't very smart and that he would probably amount to nothing. Mark used these comments to make himself better. He studied harder and worked harder because he believed that he was more than his parents' comments. In this situation, you can see that the comments helped shaped his identity differently in a positive manner.

Social

Other than using words to identify who we are, we use communication to establish relationships. Relationships exist because of communication. Each time we talk to others, we are sharing a part of ourselves with others. We know that people who have strong relationships with others are due to the conversations that they have with others. Think about all the relationships that you are involved with and how communication differs in those relationships. If you stopped talking to the people you care about, your relationships might suffer. The only way relationships can grow is when communication occurs between individuals. Joy Koesten analyzed family communication patterns and communication competence. She found that people who grew up in more conversation oriented families were also more likely to have better relationships than people who grew up in lower conversation oriented families.⁸

Practical

Communication is a key ingredient in our lives. We need it to operate and do our daily tasks. Communication is the means of telling the barista what coffee you prefer, informing your physician about what hurts, and advising others you might need help.

We know that communication helps in the business setting. Katherine Kinnick and Sabrena Par-ton maintained that communication is important in workplace settings. They found that the ability to persuade effectively was very important. Females are evaluated more on their interpersonal skills than males, and males are evaluated more on their leadership skills than interpersonal skills.⁹ Overall, we know that to do well in the business setting, one must learn to be a competent communicator.

We know that communication is not only crucial in professional settings but in personal settings. Daniel Canary, Laura Stafford, and Beth Semic found that communication behaviors are essential in marriages because it adds the relationship features.¹⁰ In another study, Laura Stafford and Daniel Canary illustrated the importance of communication in dating relationships.¹¹ Communication is needed for us to relate to others, build connections, and maintain our relationships.

Key Takeaways

- Communication is the process of one person stimulating meaning in the mind of another through messages. It includes verbal, nonverbal, and mediated forms of interaction.
- Communication helps meet physical, identity, social, and practical needs. These include maintaining mental and physical health, shaping how we see ourselves, building relationships, and navigating everyday tasks.
- Studying communication gives us insight into a skill we use constantly but rarely examine. It helps us recognize areas for improvement and develop competence through intentional learning and feedback.
- Our sense of identity is shaped through interactions with others. The comments, labels, and feedback we receive influence how we view ourselves and how we behave in response.
- Communication is essential in forming and maintaining relationships and achieving professional goals. Strong communication skills are linked to better family dynamics, romantic relationships, workplace success, and conflict resolution.

Exercises

1. Because 98% of Americans report having a cell phone, we are fairly dependent on them. Make a list of all the ways you use your phone during the day. How would your day change if you didn't have your cell phone?
2. Think of an example for each communication need. Which need is most important to you? Why?
3. Why do you think it is important to study communication? Is this class required of you? Do you think it should be a requirement for everyone?
4. Think about how your identity has been shaped by others. What is something that was said to you that affected how you felt? How do you feel now about the comment?

Basic Principles of Human Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Define the term *communication*.
2. Identify the role of symbols in human communication.
3. Describe the arbitrary nature of symbols and their shared meaning.
4. Explain the difference between denotative and connotative meanings.
5. List and describe seven basic principles of communication.

The origin of the word **communication** can be traced back to the Latin word *communico*, which is translated to mean “to join or unite,” “to connect,” “to participate in” or “to share with all.” This root word is the same one from which we get not only the word *communicate*, but also *common*, *commune*, *communion*, and *community*. Thus, we can define communication as a process by which we share ideas or information with other people. We commonly think of communication as talking, but it is much broader than just speech. Other characteristics of voice communicate messages, and we communicate, as well, with eyes, facial expressions, hand gestures, body position, and movement. Let us examine some basic principles about how we communicate with one another.

Communication Is Symbolic

Have you ever noticed that we can hear or look at something like the word “cat” and immediately know what those three letters mean? From the moment you enter grade school, you are taught how to recognize sequences of letters that form words that help us understand the world. With these words, we can create sentences, paragraphs, and books like this one. The letters used to create the word “cat” and the word itself are what communication scholars call symbols. A **symbol** is a mark, object, or sign that represents something else by association, resemblance, or convention.

Let’s think about one of the most important words commonly tossed around, love. The four letters that make up the word “love,” “l,” “o,” “v,” and “e,” are visual symbols that, when combined, form the word “love,” which is a symbol associated with intense regard or liking. For example, I can “love” chocolate. However, the same four-letter word has other meanings attached to it as well. For example, “love” can represent a deeply intimate relationship or a romantic/sexual attachment. In the first case, we could love our parents/guardians and friends, but in the second case, we experience love as a factor of a deep romantic/sexual relationship. So these are just three associations we have with the same symbol, love. In Figure 1.1, we see American Sign Language (ASL) letters for the word “love.” Here, the hands themselves represent symbols for English letters, which is an agreed-upon convention of users of ASL to represent “love.” However, there are two more communicative symbols ASL users can use to say “love” that do not involve spelling out the words themselves. Here’s a short [YouTube video](#) showing these two other symbols.

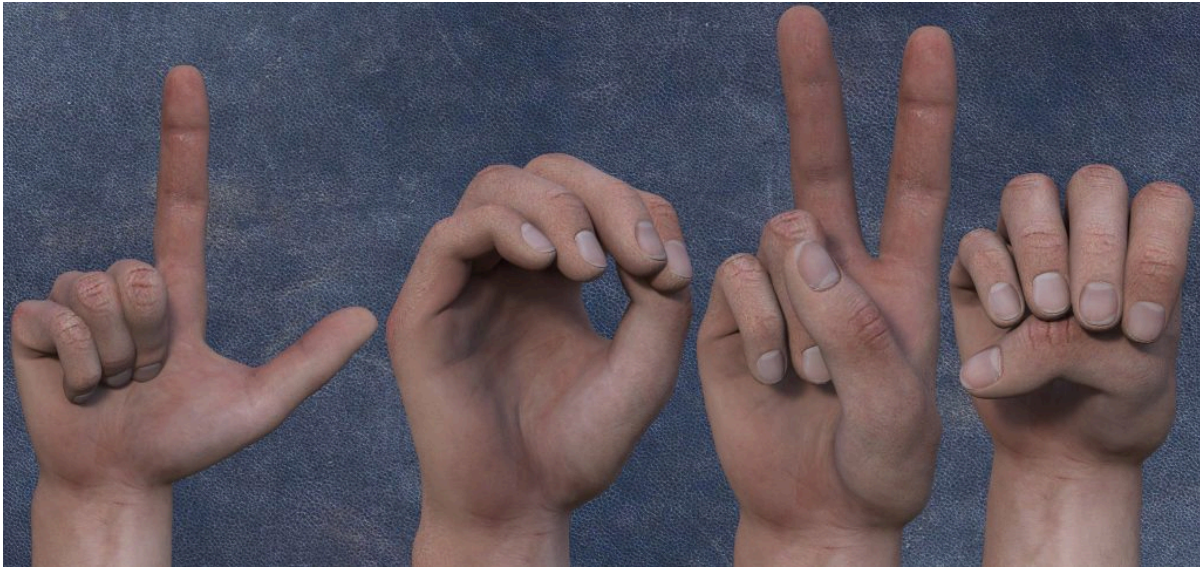


Figure 1.1 The word “love” spelled out in American Sign Language.

Symbols can also be visual representations of ideas and concepts. For example, look at the various symbols in Figure 1.1 of various social media icons. In this image, you see symbols for a range of different social media sites, including Facebook (lowercase “f”), Twitter (the bird), Snapchat (the ghost image), and many others. Admittedly, the icons for YouTube and dig just use their names, but these images have become associated with these online platforms over many years.

The Symbol is Not the Thing

Now that we’ve explained what symbols are, we should probably offer a few very important guidelines. First, the symbol is not the thing that it is representing. For example, the word “dog” is not a member of the canine family that greets you when you come home every night. If we look back at those symbols listed in Figure 1.2, those symbols are not the organizations themselves. A white ghost on the yellow background is not Snapchat. The actual thing that is “Shapchapt” is a series of computer code that exists on the World Wide Web that allows us, people, to interact.

Arbitrariness of Symbols

How we assign symbols is entirely arbitrary. For example, in Figure 1.3, we see two animals that are categorized under the symbols “dog” and “cat.” In this image, the “dog” is on the left side, and the “cat” is on the right side. The words we associate with these animals only exist because we have said it’s so for many, many years. Back when humans were labeling these animals, we could just have easily have called the one on the left “cat” and the one on the right “dog,” but we didn’t. If we called the animal on the left “cat,” would that change the nature of what that animal is? Not really. The only thing that would change is the symbol we have associated with that animal.

Let’s look at another symbolic example you are probably familiar with – :). The “smiley” face or the two pieces of punctuation (colon followed by closed parentheses). This symbol may seem like it’s everywhere today, but it’s only existed since September 1982. In early September 1982, a joke was



Figure 1.2 Social Media Icons. “Social Media Mix 3D Icons – Mix #1.” by [Blogtrepreneur](#). This file is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Unported license](#).



Figure 1.3 Dog and Cat. “Dog and cat.” by [kitty.green66](#). This file is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Unported license](#).

posted on an electronic bulletin board about a fake chemical spill at Carnegie Mellon University. There was no easy way to distinguish between serious and non-serious information. A computer scientist named Scott E. Fahlman entered the debate with the following message:

The Original Emoticons

I propose that [sic] the following character sequence for joke markers:

: -)

Read it sideways. Actually, it is probably more economical to mark things that are NOT jokes, given current trends. For this, use:

: - (

Thus, the first emoticon—a sequence of keyboard characters used to represent facial expressions or emotions—was born. Even the universal symbol for happiness, the yellow circle with a smiling face, had only existed since 1963 when graphic artist Harvey Ross Ball created it to raise employee morale at the State Mutual Life Assurance Company of Worcester, Massachusetts. These early smiley faces and emoticons laid the groundwork for what would become a visual revolution in digital communication. In the late 1990s, Japanese mobile carriers like NTT DoCoMo began developing small, expressive images known as emojis for use on mobile web platforms. Shigetaka Kurita is widely credited with designing the first set of 176 emojis for DOCOMO's i-mode system, drawing inspiration from manga, kanji, and street signs. Emojis truly became a global phenomenon when they were incorporated into the Unicode Standard in 2010, enabling consistent display across devices and platforms. Their popularity surged in 2011 when Apple introduced an emoji keyboard to the iPhone, making them instantly accessible to a worldwide audience. Today, emojis are a ubiquitous part of digital communication, used to add tone, emotion, and personality to messages—often taken for granted despite their complex and fascinating evolution (Figure 1.4).

Communication Is Shared Meaning

Hopefully, in our previous discussion about symbols, you noticed that although the assignment of symbols to real things and ideas is arbitrary, our understanding of them exists because we agree to their meaning. If we were talking and I said, “it’s time for tea,” you may think that I’m going to put on some boiling water and pull out the oolong tea. However, if I said, “it’s time for tea” in the United Kingdom, you would assume that we were getting ready for our evening meal. Same word, but two very different meanings depending on the culture one uses the term. In the United Kingdom, high tea (or meat tea) is the evening meal. Dinner would represent the large meal of the day, which is usually eaten in the middle of the day. Of course, in the United States, we refer to the mid-day meal as lunch and often refer to the evening meal as dinner (or supper).



Figure 1.4 Emojis

Let's imagine that you were recently at a party. Two of your friends had recently attended the same Broadway play together. You ask them, "How the play was," and here's how they responded:

So, we got to the theatre 20 minutes early to ensure we could get comfortable and could do some people watching before the show started. The person sitting in front of us had the worst comb-over I had ever seen. Half through Act 1, the hair was flopping back in our laps like the legs of a spider. I mean, those strands of hair had to be 8 to 9 inches long and came down on us as if they were pleading with us to rescue it. Oh, and this one woman who was sitting to our right was wearing this huge fur hat-turban thing on her head. It looked like some kind of furry animal had crawled up on her head and died. I felt horrible for the poor guy who was sitting behind her because I'm sure he couldn't see anything over or around that thing.

Here's how your second friend described the experience:

I thought the play was good enough. It had some guy from the UK who tried to have a Brooklyn accent that came in and out. The set was pretty cool, though. At one point, the set turned from a boring-looking office building into a giant tree. That was pretty darn cool. As for the overall story, it was good; I guess. The show just wasn't something I would normally see.

Here, you have the same experience described by two different people. We are only talking about the experience each person had in the abstract sense. In both cases, you had friends reporting on the same experience but from their perspectives of the experience. With your first friend, you learn more about what was going on around your friend in the theatre but not about the show itself. The second friend provided you with more details about her perception of the play, the acting, the scenery, and the story. Did we learn anything about the content of the “play” through either conversation? Not really.

Many of our conversations resemble this type of experience recall. In both cases, we have two individuals who are attempting to share with us through communication specific ideas and meanings. However, sharing meaning is not always very easy. In both cases, you asked your friends, “how the play was.” Your friend interpreted this phrase as being asked about their experience at the theatre itself. Your other friend interpreted your phrase as being a request for her opinion or critique of the play. As you can see in this example, it’s very easy to get very different responses based on how people interpret what you are asking.

Shared meaning becomes important in the courtroom. Multiple eye witness accounts are often used to support or refute claims in court cases. In research conducted by Crystal Slane and Chad Dodson titled, “Two Eyewitnesses are More Persuasive Than One Except When They Remember a Suspect’s Feature” individuals were shown pictures of suspects and asked to assess whether the suspect was guilty based on statements of two witness. When the witnesses both stated confidently, “I recognize him”, individuals were more likely to judge the suspect as guilty. Also, if both witness stated that they recognized the same facial feature such as “I remember her nose” then individuals were more likely to just the suspect as guilty. Shared meaning has consequential effects in crime.¹²

Communication scholars often say that “meanings aren’t in words, they’re in people” because of this issue related to interpretation. Yes, there are dictionary definitions of words. Earlier in this chapter, we provided three different dictionary-type definitions for the word “love:” 1) intense regard or liking, 2) a deeply intimate relationship, or 3) a romantic/sexual attachment. These types of definitions we often call **denotative definitions**. However, it’s also important to understand that besides denotative definitions, there are also **connotative definitions**, or the emotions or associations a person makes when exposed to a symbol. For example, how one understands or experiences the word “love” is connotative. The warm feeling you get, the memories of experiencing love all come together to give you a general, personalized understanding of the word itself. One of the biggest problems that occur is when one person’s denotative meaning conflicts with another person’s connotative meaning. For example, when I write the word “dog,” many of you think of four-legged furry family members. If you’ve never been a dog owner, you may just think about these animals as members of the canine family. If, however, you’ve had a terrible experience with a dog in the past, you may have very negative feelings that could lead you to feel anxious or experience dread when you

hear the word “dog.” As another example, think about clowns. Some people see clowns as cheery characters associated with the circus and birthday parties. Other people are genuinely terrified by clowns. Both the dog and clown cases illustrate how we can have symbols that have different meanings to different people.

Communication Involves Intentionality

One area that often involves a bit of controversy in communication is called intentionality. Intentionality asks whether an individual purposefully intends to interact with another person and attempt shared meaning. Each time you communicate with others, there is intentionality involved. You may want to offer your opinions or thoughts on a certain topic. However, intentionality is an important concept in communication. Think about times when you might have talked aloud without realizing another person could hear you. Communication can occur at any time. When there is intent among the parties to converse with each other, then it makes the communication more effective.

Others argue that you “cannot, not communicate.” This idea notes that we are always communicating with those around us. As we’ll talk more about later in this book, communication can be both verbal (the words we speak) and nonverbal (gestures, use of space, facial expressions, how we say words, etc.). From this perspective, our bodies are always in a state of nonverbal communication, whether or not it’s intended. Maybe you’ve walked past someone’s office and saw them hunched over at their desk, staring at a computer screen. Based on the posture of the other person, you decide not to say “hi” because the person looks like they are deep in thought and probably busy. Here, we interpret the person’s nonverbal communication as saying, “I’m busy.” In reality, that person could just as easily be looking at Facebook and killing time until someone drops by and says, “Hi.”

Dimensions of Communication

When we communicate with other people, we must 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. That is, pretending that your boss is not 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 about 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, then 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 if they were happy to see you in a new relationship, or if 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 a Process

The word "process" refers to the idea that something is ongoing, dynamic, and changing with a purpose or toward some end. A communication scholar named David K. Berlo was the first to discuss human communication as a process back in 1960.¹³ We'll examine Berlo's ideas in more detail in [Chapter 2](#), but for now, it's important to understand the basic concept of communication as a process. From Berlo's perspective, communication is a series of ongoing interactions that change over time. For example, think about the number of "inside jokes" you may have with your best friend. Sometimes you can get to the point where all you say is one word, and both of you can crack up laughing. This level of familiarity and short-hand communication didn't exist when you first met but has developed over time. Ultimately, the more interaction you have with someone, the more your relationship with that person will evolve.

Communication Is Culturally Determined

The word culture refers to a "group of people who through a process of learning can share perceptions of the world that influences their beliefs, values, norms, and rules, which eventually affect behavior."¹⁴ Let's breakdown this definition. First, it's essential to recognize that culture is something we learn. From the moment we are born, we start to learn about our culture. We learn culture from our families, our schools, our peers, and many other sources as we age. Specifically, we learn perceptions of the world. We learn about morality. We learn about our relationship with our surroundings. We learn about our places in a greater society. These perceptions ultimately influence what we believe, what we value, what we consider "normal," and what rules we live by. For exam-

ple, many of us have beliefs, values, norms, and rules that are directly related to the religion we were raised. As an institution, religion is often one of the dominant factors of culture around the world.

Let's start by looking at how religion can affect beliefs. Your faith can affect what you believe about the nature of life and death. For some, you live well and you'll go to a happy place (Heaven, Nirvana, Elysium, etc.) or a negative place (Hell, Samsara, Tartarus, etc.). We should mention that Samsara is less a "place" and more the process of reincarnation as well as one's actions and consequences from the past, present, and future.

Religion can also affect what you value. Cherokee are taught to value the earth and the importance of keep balance with the earth. Some members of Judaic religions, on the other hand, view passages that give Adam the directive to "subdue" the earth, as an indication of a hierarchy placing humans in charge of the earth. As such, the value is more in what the earth can provide than in ensuring harmony with nature.

Religion can also affect what you view as "normal." Many religions stress the importance of female modesty, so it is normal for women to wear specific dress to ensure they do not show their figures or little to no skin. One branch of Raëlianism promotes a pro-sex feminist stance where nudity and sex work are normal and even celebrated.

Different religions have different rules that are created and handed down. For most Western readers, the most famous set of rules is probably the Judaic tradition's Ten Commandments. Conversely, Hindus have a text of religious laws transmitted in the Vedas. Most major religions have, at some point or another, had religious texts that became enshrined laws within those societies.

Finally, these beliefs, values, norms, and rules ultimately affect how all of us interact and behave with others. The critical part to remember about these actual behaviors is that we often do not know how (and to what degree) our culture influences our communicative behavior until we are interacting with someone from a culture that differs from ours. We'll talk more about issues of intercultural interpersonal interaction later in this text.

Communication Occurs in a Context

Another factor that influences how we understand others is the context, the circumstance, environment, setting, and/or situation surrounding an interaction. Most people learning about context are exposed during elementary school when they are trying to figure out the meaning of a specific word. You may have seen a complicated word and been told to use "context clues" to understand what the word means. In the same vein, when we analyze how people are communicating, we must understand the context of that communication.

Imagine you're hanging out at your local restaurant, and you hear someone at the next table say, "I can't believe that guy. He's always out in left field!" As an American idiom, we know that "out in left field" refers to something unexpected or unusual. The term stems from baseball because the player who hangs out in left field has the farthest to throw to get a baseball back to the first baseman to tag out a runner. However, if you were listening to this conversation in farmland, you could hear someone describe a specific geographic location (e.g., "He was out in left field chasing after a goat who stumbled that way"). Here, context does matter.

Communication Is Purposeful

We communicate for different reasons. We communicate to persuade people. We communicate to get people to like us. We communicate to express our liking of other people. We could list different reasons we communicate with other people. Often we may not even be aware of the specific reason or need we have for communicating with others. We'll examine more of the different needs that communication fulfills along with the motives we often have for communicating with others in [Chapter 2](#).

Key Takeaways

- Communication is derived from the Latin *communico*, meaning “to share.” It is the process by which we exchange ideas, feelings, and meaning using verbal, nonverbal, and symbolic forms.
- Symbols are marks, signs, words, or images that stand in for ideas, objects, or experiences. We use them in speech, writing, body language, and even emojis to convey meaning to others.
- The relationship between a symbol and what it represents is arbitrary, but meaning is made possible through shared agreement. Communication depends on people assigning common meaning to these symbols.
- The denotative meaning of a word is its formal dictionary definition, while the connotative meaning refers to the emotional and personal associations an individual attaches to the word.
- The seven key principles of communication are:
 - Communication involves symbols
 - Communication seeks shared meaning
 - Communication can be intentional or unintentional
 - Communication has both relational and content dimensions
 - Communication is a process
 - Communication is culturally determined
 - Communication occurs in a context and is purposeful

Exercises

1. In groups, provide a real-life example for each of these aspects: Communication involves shared meaning, communication is a process, has a relationship, intent, &

content dimension, occurs in a context, communication is purposeful, and it is culturally defined.

2. As a class, come up with different words. Then, divide the class and randomly distribute the words. Each group will try to get the other group to guess their words either by drawing symbols or displaying nonverbal behaviors. Then, discuss how symbols impact perception and language.
3. Can you think of some examples of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis? For instance, in Japan, the word “backyard” does not exist. Because space is so limited, most Japanese people do not have backyards. This term is foreign to them, but in America, most of our houses have a backyard.

Communication Competence

Learning Objectives

1. Define communication competence.
2. Distinguish between appropriate and effective communication.
3. Describe how communication competence can vary across contexts and individuals.
4. Identify six core characteristics of competent communicators.
5. Explain why communication competence can be learned and improved.

Not all communication is created equal—some interactions are more successful than others in achieving desired outcomes while maintaining positive relationships. Communication competence represents the ability to communicate effectively across different situations and contexts, balancing our personal goals with social expectations. This competence is not an innate talent but a set of skills that can be learned and improved through practice and self-awareness. Understanding what makes communication competent provides a foundation for developing stronger interpersonal abilities in both personal and professional settings.

Defining Competence

Brian Spitzberg (2000) argued that **communication competence** involved being both appropriate and effective.¹⁵ **Appropriate communication** is what most people would consider acceptable behavior. **Effective communication** is getting your desired personal outcome.

You might think about communicators who were appropriate and not effective and vice versa. The two characteristics go hand in hand. You need to have both to be competent. Think about

coaches who might say horrible or inappropriate things to their players to motivate them. This may be viewed as highly effective by some, but possibly very inappropriate by others. Especially if you are not used to harsh language or foul language, then your perceptions could hinder how you feel about the speaker. You might have individuals who are highly appropriate but are not effective. They may say the right things, but cannot get any results. For instance, imagine a mother who is trying over and over to get her child to brush their teeth. She might try praises or persuasive techniques, but if the child doesn't brush their teeth, then she is not accomplishing her goal. You truly need a balance between the two.

Understanding Competence

First, there is not a best or ultimate effective way of communicating that works for everyone. Think about the speakers that you know. Perhaps some are very charismatic, humorous, assertive, and more timid than others. Just as there are many types of speakers and speaking styles, there are different competent communicators. For example, a joke in one context might be hilarious, but that same joke might be very offensive in another context. What this tells us is that there is no guaranteed or definite method that will work in every situation. Communication that works in one context and not another depends on the culture and the characteristics of the person or persons receiving the message.

We know that communication varies from one context to another. For instance, kindergarten teachers may be wonderful in a room full of five-year-olds, but if you asked them to present in a college classroom, they might get a little nervous because the situation is different. Some situations are better for certain speakers than others. Some people can rise to the occasion and truly deliver a memorable speech in a moment of crisis. However, if you asked them to do it again, they might not do so because of the situational variables that influenced the speech. Some individuals are wonderful public speakers but truly cannot communicate in interpersonal relationships and vice versa. These situations occur because some people feel more comfortable in certain settings than others. Hence, competency can vary depending on the type of communication.

Also, competence can be taught. The main reason for taking a communication course is so important is to be a better speaker. Hence, this is why many schools make it a requirement for college students. Think about an invention or idea you've had. If you can't communicate that idea/invention, then it will probably never come to fruition.

Characteristics of Competence

Now that you know more about competence, it is important to note that competent communicators often share many similar characteristics. Studies on competence illustrate that competent communicators have distinctive characteristics that differ from incompetent communicators. We will discuss a few of these characteristics in this section.

Skillful

First, many competent communicators are skillful. They use situational cues to figure out which approach might be best. Think about a car salesperson and about how they will approach a customer who wants to make a purchase. If the salesperson is too aggressive, then they might lose a sale. For that reason, they need to cater to their customer and make sure that they meet their customer's needs. The salesperson might directly approach the customer by simply saying, "Hi I'm Jamie, I would be happy to help you today," or by asking questions like, "I see you looking at cars today. Are you interested in a particular model?", or they could ask the customer to talk more by saying, "Can you tell me more about what you are looking for?" And perhaps, even complimenting the customer. Each of these strategies illustrates how a salesperson can be skillful in meeting the customer's expectations and, at the same time, fulfilling their own goals. Just like a chef has many ingredients to use to prepare a dish, a competent communicator possesses many skills to use depending on the situation.

Adaptable

Second, competent communicators are adaptable. I am sure you might have seen a speaker who uses technology like PowerPoint to make their presentations. What happens if technology fails, does the speaker perform poorly as well? Competent communicators would not let technology stop them from presenting their message. They can perform under pressure and under any type of constraint. For instance, if the communicator is presenting and notices that the audience has become bored, then they might change up their presentation and make it more exciting and lively to incite the audience.

Involved

Third, competent communicators can get others involved. Competent communicators think about their audience and being understood. They can get people excited about a cause or effort and create awareness or action. Think about motivational speakers and how they can get people encouraged to do something. The same idea is for competent communicators; they have the skill to involve their audience to do something such as protest, vote, or donate. Think about politicians who make speeches and provide so many interesting statements that people are more inclined to vote in a certain direction.

Understands Their Audience

Fourth, competent communicators can understand their audience. Keeping with the same example of politicians, many of them will say things like, "I know what it is like not to feed your family, to struggle to make ends meet, or not to have a job. I know what you are going through. I understand where you are coming from." These phrases are ways of creating a bond between the speaker and the receiver of the message. Competent communicators can empathize and figure out the best way to approach the situation. For instance, if someone you know had a miscarriage and truly wanted to have kids for a long time, then it would probably be very inconsiderate to say, "just try again." This

comment would be vulgar, especially if this person has already tried for a long time to have a child. A competent communicator would have to think about how this person might feel and what words would genuinely be more appropriate to the situation.

Cognitive Complexity

Fifth, knowing how to say the same thing in different ways is called **cognitive complexity**. You might think that the only way to express affection would be to say, “I love you” or “I care about you.” What other ways could you express affection? This skill is cognitively complex. Think about a professor you’ve had who used different methods to explain the same concept. Your professor might say, “To solve this problem, you might try method A, and if that doesn’t work, you could try method B, and method C is still another way.” This illustrates that you don’t have to say things one way; you could say it in different ways. This helps your audience understand your message better because you provided different ways to comprehend your intended message.

Self-Monitoring

The last characteristic of competent communicators is the ability to monitor themselves. It is also known as **self-monitoring**. This is the ability to focus on your behavior, and determine how to behave in the situation. In every speaking situation, most people will have an internal gauge of what they might say next or not say. Some people give no thought to what they might say to others. These individuals would have low self-monitoring skills, so what you see is what you get. You could have high self-monitors who pay attention to every little thing, how they stand, where their eyes move, how they gesture, and maybe even how they breathe. They pay attention to these minor details because they are concerned with how the message might come across to others. Competent communicators have a balance of high and low self-monitoring, in which they realize how they might be perceived, but they are not overly focused on all the details of themselves.

Research Spotlight



In 2023, Johanna Isabella van Tonder, Jacques Jordaan, and Karel Esterhuyse conducted a study examining the intersection of interpersonal communication competence, self-esteem, and loneliness among college students in South Africa.¹⁶ After surveying 1,191 South African undergraduate students, the researchers found that both interpersonal communication competence and self-esteem were significant predictors of loneliness levels. They also examined media consumption across various contexts, but media use did not significantly predict loneliness.

Key Takeaways

- Communication competence refers to the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in various situations. It involves striking a balance between personal goals and social expectations.
- Appropriate communication refers to behavior that aligns with the social context, while effective communication involves achieving the intended outcome. True competence requires both.
- Communication competence is situational. A person may be effective in one context and less so in another, depending on the audience, culture, or setting.
- Competent communicators share key characteristics: they are skillful, adaptable, involved, audience-aware, show cognitive complexity, and practice self-monitoring.
- Competence is not innate—it is learned. Through practice, feedback, and self-reflection, individuals can enhance their communication skills in both personal and professional contexts.

Exercises

1. Who do you think are competent/incompetent communicators? Why?
2. How would you rate yourself as a competent speaker? Give a brief impromptu speech, then ask someone to rate you based on the characteristics of competence. Do you agree? Why or why not?
3. Using cognitive complexity skills, think about all the ways you can express affection/hatred. Talk about how these ways would be interpreted by others—positively/negatively and why? Does it matter if the other person was of a different sex, culture, gender, ethnicity, age, or religion? How and why?

Types of Human Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Define *intrapersonal communication* and describe its internal nature.

2. Explain *interpersonal communication* and identify common contexts where it occurs.
3. Describe the structure and purpose of *small group communication*.
4. Identify characteristics of *public communication* and how it differs from other types.
5. Recognize the role of technology in *mediated communication* and give examples of its use.

Human communication occurs at multiple levels, each serving different purposes and involving varying numbers of participants. As illustrated in Figure 1.5, these levels of communication form a hierarchy that ranges from the most personal and internal forms to the broadest and most technologically mediated interactions. Understanding the different forms of communication helps us recognize the diverse ways we exchange information, build relationships, and connect with others throughout our daily lives. Each level presents unique characteristics, challenges, and opportunities for effective interaction, from the self-talk that guides our internal decision-making to the complex mediated communications that connect us across vast distances.

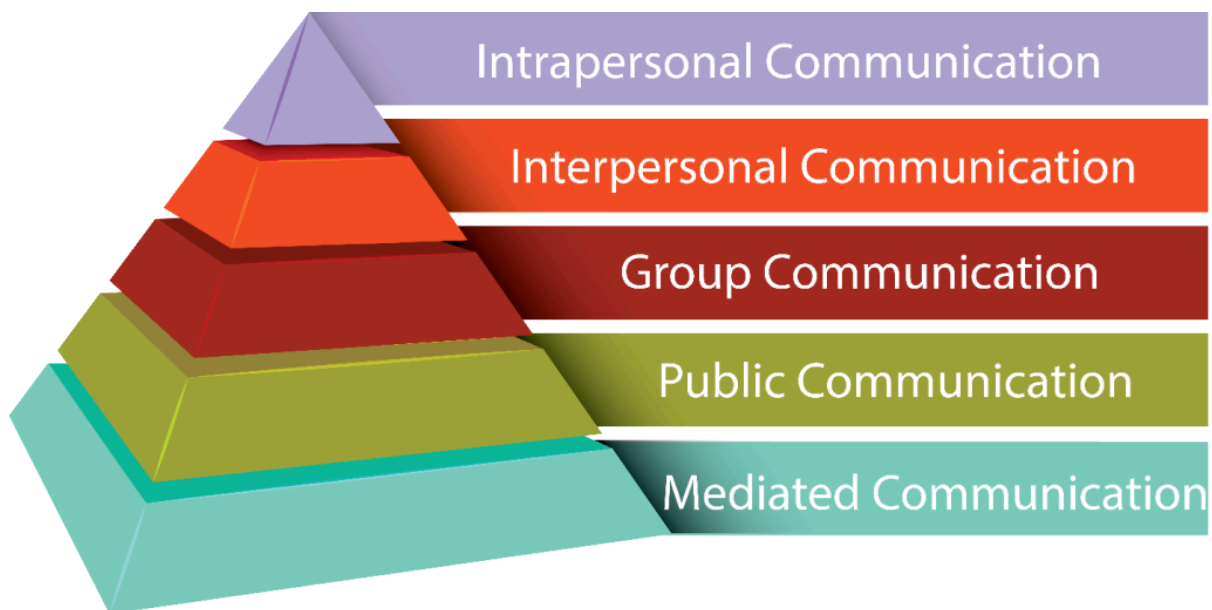


Figure 1.5 Levels of Communication

Intrapersonal Communication

Intrapersonal communication refers to communication phenomena that exist within or occur because of an individual's self or mind. Some forms of intrapersonal communication can resemble a conversation one has with oneself. This "self-talk" is often used to help us make decisions or make sense of the world. Maybe you've gone to the grocery store, and you're repeating your grocery list over and over in your head to make sure you forget nothing. Maybe you keep a diary or journal where you keep track of everything that has happened that day. Or perhaps you're having a debate inside your head about what major you should pick. You consider the advantages and disadvantages

of different subjects to help you decide what you want to study. All three examples help illustrate some of what is covered by the term “intrapersonal communication.”

Today, scholars view the term “intrapersonal communication” a little more broadly than just the internal self-talk we engage in. Communication scholar Samuel Riccillo primarily discusses intrapersonal communication as a factor of biology.¹⁷ From this perspective, we must think about the biological underpinnings of how we can communicate. The human brain is probably the single most crucial physiological part of human interactions. We know that how people communicate can be affected by their brains. As such, our definition of intrapersonal communication is broad enough to include both traditional discussions of self-talk and more modern examinations of how the human body helps or hinders our ability to communicate effectively.

Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication, which is what this book is all about, focuses on the exchange of messages between two people. Our days are full of interpersonal communication. You wake up, roll over, and say good morning to your significant other, then you’ve had your first interpersonal interaction of the day. You meet your best friend for coffee before work and discuss the ins and outs of children’s lives; you’re engaging in interpersonal communication again. You go to work and work with a coworker on a project; once again, you’re engaging in interpersonal communication. You then shoot off an email to your babysitter, reminding him to drop by the house at seven so you and your partner can have a night out. Yep, this is interpersonal communication too. You drop by your doctor’s office for your annual physical, and the two of you talk about any health issues, this is also a form of interpersonal communication. You text your child to remind him he has play practice at 5:00 p.m. and needs to come home immediately afterward, you’ve engaged in interpersonal interaction. Hopefully, you’re realizing that our days are filled with tons of interpersonal interactions.

Some scholars also refer to interpersonal communication as dyadic communication because it involves two people or a dyad. As you saw above, the type of dyad can range from intimate partners, to coworkers, to doctor-patient, to friends, to parent-child, and many other dyadic partnerships. Now we can engage in these interactions through verbal communication, nonverbal communication, and mediated communication. When we use words during our interaction to convey specific meaning, then we’re engaging in verbal communication. Nonverbal communication refers to a range of other factors that can affect how we understand each other. For example, the facial expressions you have. You could talk to your best friend over coffee about a coworker and “his problems” while rolling your eyes to emphasize how overly dramatic and nonsensical you find the person. A great deal of how we interpret the verbal message of someone is based on the nonverbal messages sent at the same time. Last, we engage in interpersonal interactions using mediated technologies like the cellphone, email, texts, Facebook posts, Tweets, etc. Your average professional spends much of their day responding to emails that come from one person, so the email exchange is a form of interpersonal communication.

Small Group Communication

The next type of communication studied by communication scholars, but still important for interpersonal communication, is small group communication. Although different scholars will differ on the exact number of people that make a group, we can say that a **group** is at least three people interacting with a common goal. Sometimes these groups could be as large as 15, but larger groups become much harder to manage and end up with more problems. One hallmark of a small group is the ability for all the group members to engage in interpersonal interactions with all the other group members.

We engage in small groups throughout our lives. Chances are, you've engaged in some group project for a grade while you've been in school. This experience may have been a great one or a horrible one, depending on the personalities within the group, the ability of the group to accomplish the goal, the in-fighting of group members, and many other factors. If you like group work, you will engage in many groups (some effective and some ineffective) over your lifespan. We're all born into a family, which is a specific type of group relationship. When you were younger, you may have been in play groups. As you grew older, you had groups of friends you did things with. As you enter the professional world, you will probably be on some work "team," which is just a specialized type of group. Group communication is a part of life.

Public Communication

The next category of communication is called public communication. **Public communication** occurs when an individual or group of individuals sends a specific message to an audience. This one-to-many way of communicating is often necessary when groups become too large to maintain interactions with all group members. One of the most common forms of public communication is public speaking. Just tune into any election cycle, and you'll see people of all political stripes attending candidate speeches.

The size of the audience one speaks to will affect how someone delivers a speech. If you're giving a speech to ten people, you can watch all your audience members and receive real-time feedback as people nod their heads in agreement or disagreement. If you're speaking to 10,000+ people at once, there is no way for a speaker to watch all their audience members and get feedback. With a smaller audience, a speaker can adapt their message on the fly as they interpret audience feedback. With a larger audience, a speaker is more likely to deliver a very prepared speech that does not alter based on individual audience members' feedback. Although this book is not a public speaking book, we would recommend that anyone take a public speaking class because it's such an essential and valuable skill in the 21st century. As we are bombarded with more and more messages, being an effective speaker is more important today than ever before.

Mediated Communication

The last type of communication is **mediated communication**, or the use of some form of technology to facilitate information between two or more people. We already mentioned a few forms of

mediated communication when we talked about interpersonal communication: phone calls, emails, text messaging, etc. In each of these cases, mediated technology is used to facilitate the sharing of information between two people.

Most mediated communication occurs because technology functions as the link between someone sending information and someone receiving information. For example, you go online and look up the statistics from last night's baseball game. The website you choose is the link between you and the reporter who authored the information. In the same way, if you looked up these same results in a newspaper, the newspaper would be the link between you and the reporter who wrote the article. The technology may have changed from print to electronic journalism, but the basic concept is still very much alive.

Today, we are surrounded by tons of different media options. Some common ones include cable, satellite television, the World Wide Web, content streaming services (i.e., Netflix, Hulu, etc.), social media, magazines, voice and video over internet protocol (Zoom, WebEx, etc.), and so many others. We have more forms of mediated communication today than we have ever had before in history. Most of us will only experience and use a fraction of the mediated communication technologies that are available to us today.

Key Takeaways

- Intrapersonal communication encompasses internal dialogue, decision-making, and self-reflection. It involves mental processes such as self-talk, journaling, and internal problem-solving, and can also reflect the influence of biological factors on thought.
- Interpersonal communication refers to communication between two people and can happen face-to-face or through technology. It includes interactions with friends, coworkers, partners, doctors, and others in both casual and formal settings.
- Small group communication occurs when three or more individuals interact with a shared goal. This kind of communication is common in families, teams, workgroups, and social circles, and it requires active participation and cooperation.
- Public communication is a one-to-many form of communication, where a speaker addresses a large audience. Public speaking is a familiar example, often requiring planning and adaptation to suit the audience size and setting.
- Mediated communication uses technology to send and receive messages. It includes emails, texts, video chats, websites, and social media—tools that allow people to communicate over time and distance through digital or physical media.

Exercises

1. What are some benefits of mediated communication? What are some drawbacks? How does it affect the message?
2. Which types of communication would be the most difficult/easiest to study and why?
3. As a group, think of some prospective research studies for each type of communication. Why would it be important to study?

Understanding Mindful Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Define the term *mindfulness*.
2. Describe the difference between *mindful awareness* and *mindful practice*.
3. Identify the three components of Shapiro and Carlson's model of mindfulness: attention, intention, and attitude.
4. List and describe the five facets of mindfulness as outlined by Ruth Baer.
5. Explain how mindfulness relates to interpersonal communication.

The words “mindful,” “mindfulness,” and “mindlessness” have received a lot of attention both within academic circles and outside of them. Many people hear the word “mindful” and picture a yogi sitting on a mountain peak in lotus position, meditating while listening to the wind. And for some people, that form of mindfulness is perfectly fine, but it’s not necessarily beneficial for the rest of us. Instead, mindfulness has become a tool that can improve all facets of an individual’s life. In this section, we’re going to explore mindfulness and develop an understanding of what we will call in this book “mindful communication.”

Defining Mindfulness

Several different definitions have appeared trying to explain what these terms mean. Let’s look at just a few of definitions that have been put forward for the term “mindfulness.”

1. “[M]indfulness as a particular type of social practice that leads the practitioner to an ethically minded awareness, intentionally situated in the here and now.”¹⁸
2. “[D]eliberate, open-minded awareness of moment-to-moment perceptible experience that ordinarily requires gradual refinement by means of systematic practice; is characterized by a

nondiscursive, nonanalytic investigation of ongoing experience; is fundamentally sustained by such attitudes as kindness, tolerance, patience, and courage; and is markedly different from everyday modes of awareness.”¹⁹

3. “[T]he process of drawing novel distinctions... The process of drawing novel distinctions can lead to a number of diverse consequences, including (1) a greater sensitivity to one’s environment, (2) more openness to new information, (3) the creation of new categories for structuring perception, and (4) enhanced awareness of multiple perspectives in problem solving.”²⁰
4. “Mindfulness is a flexible state of mind in which we are actively engaged in the present, noticing new things and sensitive to context, with an open, nonjudgmental orientation to experience.”²¹
5. “[F]ocusing one’s attention in a nonjudgmental or accepting way on the experience occurring in the present moment [and] can be contrasted with states of mind in which attention is focused elsewhere, including preoccupation with memories, fantasies, plans, or worries, and behaving automatically without awareness of one’s actions.”²²
6. “[T]he focus of a person’s attention is opened to admit whatever enters experience, while at the same time, a stance of kindly curiosity allows the person to investigate whatever appears, without falling prey to automatic judgment or reactivity.”²³
7. “Paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.”²⁴
8. “Mindfulness is the practice of returning to being centered in this living moment right now and right here, being openly and kindly present to our own immediate mental, emotional, and bodily experiencing, and without judgment.”²⁵
9. “[A]wareness of one’s internal states and surroundings. The concept has been applied to various therapeutic interventions—for example, mindfulness-based cognitive behavior therapy, mindfulness-based stress reduction, and mindfulness meditation—to help people avoid destructive or automatic habits and responses by learning to observe their thoughts, emotions, and other present-moment experiences without judging or reacting to them.”²⁶
10. “[A] multifaceted construct that includes paying attention to present-moment experiences, labeling them with words, acting with awareness, avoiding automatic pilot, and bringing an attitude of openness, acceptance, willingness, allowing, nonjudging, kindness, friendliness, and curiosity to all observed experiences.”²⁷

What we see within these definitions of the term “mindfulness” is a spectrum of ideas ranging from more traditional Eastern perspectives on mindfulness (usually stemming out of Buddhism) to more Western perspectives on mindfulness arising out of the pioneering research conducted by Ellen Langer.²⁸

Toward a Mindfulness Model

Shauna Shapiro and Linda Carlson, take the notion of mindfulness a step farther and try to differentiate between mindful awareness and mindful practice:

(a) Mindful awareness, an abiding presence or awareness, a deep knowing that contributes to freedom of the mind (e.g. freedom from reflexive conditioning and delusion) and (b) mindful practice, the systematic practice of intentionally attending in an open, caring, and discerning way, which involves both knowing and shaping the mind. To capture both aspects we define the construct of mindfulness as “the awareness that arises through intentionally attending in an open, caring, and discerning way.”²⁹

The importance of this perspective is that Shapiro and Carlson recognize that mindfulness is a cognitive, behavioral, and affective process. So, let’s look at each of these.

Mindful Awareness

First, we have the notion of mindful awareness. Most of what **mindful awareness** is attending to what’s going on around you at a deeper level. Let’s start by thinking about awareness as a general concept. According to the American Psychological Association’s dictionary, awareness is “perception or knowledge of something.”³⁰ Awareness involves recognizing or understanding an idea or phenomenon. For example, take a second and think about your breathing. Most of the time, we are not aware of our breathing because our body performs this activity for us unconsciously. We don’t have to remind ourselves to breathe in and out with every breath. If we did, we’d never be able to sleep or do anything else. However, if you take a second and focus on your breathing, you are consciously aware of your breathing. Most breathing exercises, whether for acting, meditation, public speaking, singing, etc., are designed to make you aware of your breath since we are not conscious of our breathing most of the time.

Mindful awareness takes being aware to a different level. Going back to our breathing example. Take a second and focus again on your breathing. Now ask yourself a few questions:

- a. How do you physically feel while breathing? Why?
- b. What are you thinking about while breathing?
- c. What emotions do you experience while breathing?

The goal then of mindful awareness is to be consciously aware of what you’re physical presence, cognitive processes, and emotional state are while engaged in an activity. More importantly, it’s not about judging these; it’s simply about being aware and noticing.

Mindful Practice

Mindful practice, as described by Shapiro and Carlson, is “the conscious development of skills such as greater ability to direct and sustain our attention, less reactivity, greater discernment and compassion, and enhanced capacity to disidentify from one’s concept of self.”³¹ To help further

explore the concept of mindful practice, Shauna Shapiro, Linda Carlson, John Astin, and Benedict Freedman proposed a three-component model (Figure 1.6): attention, intention, and attitude.³²

Attention

“*Attention* involves attending fully to the present moment instead of allowing ourselves to become preoccupied with the past or future.”³³ Essentially, **attention** is being aware of what’s happening internally and externally moment-to-moment. By internally, we’re talking about what’s going on in your head. What are your thoughts and feelings? By externally, what’s going on in your physical environment. To be mindful, someone must be able to focus on the here and now. Unfortunately, humans aren’t very good at being attentive. Our minds wander about 47% of the time.³⁴ Some people say that humans suffer from “monkey mind,”

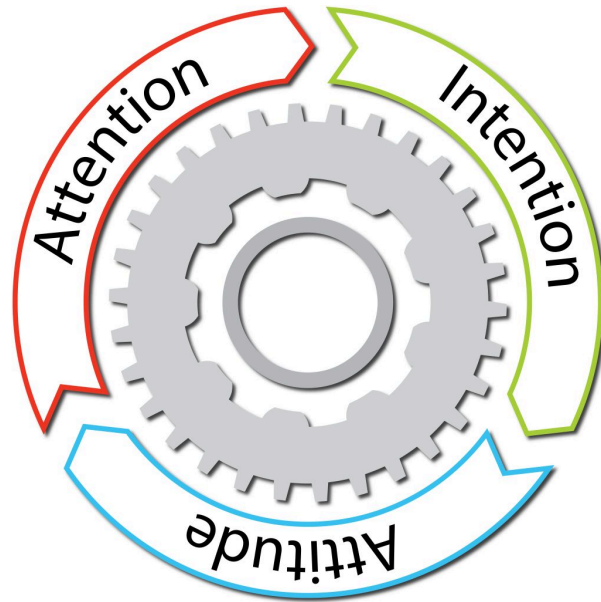


Figure 1.6 Model of Mindfulness

or the tendency of our thoughts to swing from one idea to the next.³⁵ As such, being mindful is partially being aware of when our minds shift to other ideas then refocusing ourselves.

Intention

“**Intention** involves knowing *why* we are doing what we are doing: our ultimate aim, our vision, and our aspiration.”³⁶ The second step in mindful practice is knowing why you’re doing something. Let’s say that you’ve decided that you want to exercise more. If you want to engage in a more mindful exercise practice, the first step is to figure out why you want to exercise and what your goals are. Do you want to exercise because you know you need to be healthier? Are you exercising because you’re worried about having a heart attack? Are you exercising because you want to get a bikini body before the summer? Again, the goal here is simple: be honest with ourselves about our intentions.

Attitude

“**Attitude**, or *how* we pay attention, enables us to stay open, kind, and curious.”³⁷ Essentially, we can all bring different perspectives when we’re attending to something. For example, “attention can have a cold, critical quality, or an openhearted, curious, and compassionate quality.”³⁸ As you can see, we can approach being mindful from different vantage points. Hence, the “attitude with which you undertake the practice of paying attention and being in the present is crucial”³⁹ One facet of mindfulness is being open and non-judging, so having that “cold, critical quality” is antithetical to being mindful. Instead, the goal of mindfulness must be one of openness and non-judgment.

So, what types of attitudes should one attempt to develop to be mindful? Daniel Siegel proposed the acronym COAL when thinking about our attitudes: curiosity, openness, acceptance, and love.⁴⁰

1. C stands for curiosity (inquiring without being judgmental).
2. O stands for openness (having the freedom to experience what is occurring as simply the truth, without judgments).
3. A stands for acceptance (taking as a given the reality of and the need to be precisely where you are).
4. L stands for love (being kind, compassionate, and empathetic to others and to yourself).⁴¹

Jon Kabat-Zinn, on the other hand, recommends seven specific attitudes that are necessary for mindfulness:

1. Non-judging: observing without categorizing or evaluating.
2. Patience: accepting and tolerating the fact that things happen in their own time.
3. Beginner's Mind: seeing everything as if for the very first time.
4. Trust: believing in ourselves, our experiences, and our feelings.
5. Non-striving: being in the moment without specific goals.
6. Acceptance: seeing things as they are without judgment.
7. Letting Go: allowing things to be as they are and getting bogged down by things we cannot change.

Neither Siegel's COAL nor Kabat-Zinn's seven attitudes is an exhaustive list of attitudes that can be important to mindfulness. Still, they give you a representative idea of the attitudes that can affect mindfulness. Ultimately, "the attitude that we bring to the practice of mindfulness will, to a large extent, determine its long-term value. Therefore, consciously cultivating certain attitudes can be very helpful... Keeping particular attitudes in mind is actually part of the training itself."⁴²

Five Facets of Mindfulness

From a social scientific point of view, one of the most influential researchers in mindfulness has been Ruth Baer. Dr. Baer's most significant contribution to the field has been her Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire, which you can take on her [website](#). Dr. Baer's research concluded that there are five different facets of mindfulness: observing, describing, acting with awareness, non-judging of inner experience, and nonreactivity to inner experience (Figure 1.8).⁴³

Observing

The first facet of mindfulness is **observing**, or "noticing or attending to a variety of internal or external phenomena (e.g., bodily sensations, cognitions, emotions, sounds)."⁴⁴ When one is engaged in mindfulness, one of the basic goals is to be aware of what is going on inside oneself and in the external environment. Admittedly, staying in the moment and observing can be difficult because our minds are always trying to shift to new topics and ideas (again, that darn monkey brain).

Describing

The second facet of mindfulness is **describing**, or "putting into words observations of inner experiences of perceptions, thoughts, feelings, sensations, and emotions."⁴⁵ The goal of describing

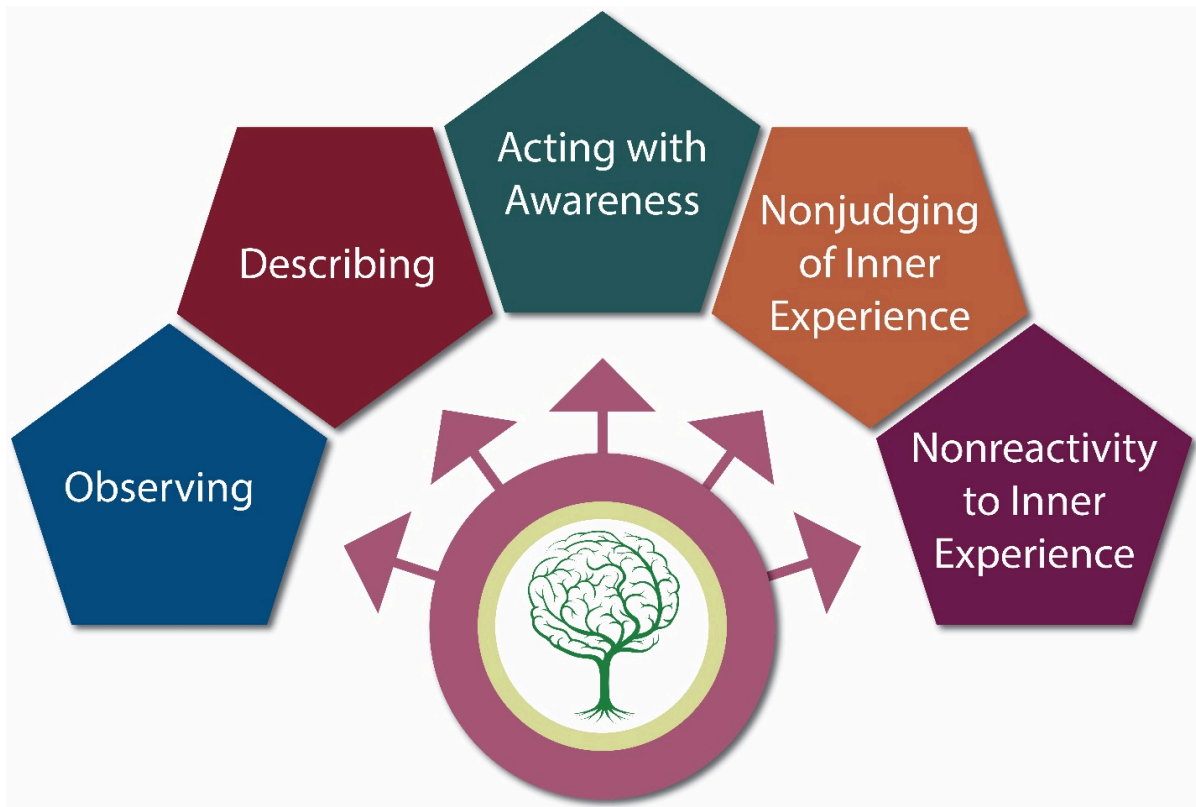


Figure 1.7 Five Facets of Mindfulness

is to stay in the moment by being detail-focused on what is occurring. We should note that having a strong vocabulary makes describing what is occurring much easier.

Acting with Awareness

The third facet of mindfulness is **acting with awareness**, or “engaging fully in one’s present activity rather than functioning on automatic pilot.”⁴⁶ When it comes to acting with awareness, it’s important to focus one’s attention purposefully. In our day-to-day lives, we often engage in behaviors without being consciously aware of what we are doing. For example, have you ever thought about your routine for showering? Most of us have a pretty specific ritual we use in the shower (the steps we engage in as we shower). Still, most of us do this on autopilot without really taking the time to realize how ritualized this behavior is.

Non-judging of Inner Experience

The fourth facet of mindfulness is the **non-judging of inner experience**, which involves being consciously aware of one’s thoughts, feelings, and attitudes without judging them. One of the hardest things for people when practicing mindfulness not judging themselves or their inner experiences. As humans, we are pretty judgmental and like to evaluate most things as positive or negative, good or bad, etc.... However, one of the goals of mindfulness is to be present and aware. As soon as

you start judging your thoughts, feelings, and attitudes, you stop being present and become focused on your evaluations and not your experiences.

Nonreactivity to Inner Experience

The last facet of mindfulness is **nonreactivity to inner experience** “Nonreactivity is about becoming consciously aware of distressing thoughts, emotions, and mental images without automatically responding to them.”⁴⁷ Nonreactivity to inner experience is related to not judging your inner experience, but the difference is in our reaction. Nonreactivity involves taking a step back and evaluating things from a more logical, dispassionate perspective. Often, we get so bogged down in our thoughts, emotions, and mental images that we end up preventing ourselves from engaging in life.

For example, one common phenomenon that plagues many people is impostor syndrome, or perceived intellectual phoniness.⁴⁸ Some people, who are otherwise very smart and skilled, believe that they are frauds and are just minutes away from being found out. Imagine being a brilliant brain surgeon but always afraid someone’s going to figure out that you don’t know what you’re doing. Nonreactivity to our inner experience involves recognizing our thoughts without letting them dictate our actions. Admittedly, nonreactivity to inner experience is easier described than done for many of us.

Mindfulness Activity



As a simple exercise to get you started in mindfulness, we want to spend 15 minutes coloring. Yep, you heard that right. We want you to color. Now, this may seem a bit of an odd request. Still, research has shown us that coloring is an excellent activity for increasing mindfulness, reducing anxiety/stress, and improving your mood.^{49,50,51,52} Coloring also has direct effects on our physiology by reducing our heart rates and blood pressure.⁵³ Coloring also helps college students reduce their test anxiety.⁵⁴ For this exercise, we’ve created an interpersonal communication mandala-inspired coloring page. According to Lawrence Shapiro, author of [*Mindful Coloring: A Simple and Fun Way to Reduce Stress in Your Life*](#), here are the basic steps you should take to engage in mindful coloring:

- Set aside 5 to 15 minutes to practice mindful coloring.
- Find a time and place where you will not be interrupted.
- Gather your materials to do your coloring and sit comfortably at a table. Set a time for 5 to 15 minutes. You should try and continue your mindful practice until the alarm goes off.

- Choose any design you like and begin coloring wherever you like.
- As you color, start paying attention to your breathing. You will probably find that your breathing is becoming slower and deeper, but you don't have to *try* to relax. In fact, you don't have to try and do anything. Just pay attention to the design, to your choice of colors, and to the process of coloring.⁵⁵

After completing this simple exercise, answer the following questions:

1. How did it feel to focus on coloring?
2. Did you find your mind wandering to other topics while coloring? If so, how did you refocus yourself?
3. How hard would it be to have the same level of concentration when you're talking with someone?

Interpersonal Communication and Mindfulness

For our purposes within this book, we want to look at issues related to mindful interpersonal communication that spans across these definitions. Although the idea of “mindfulness” and communication is not new,^{56,57} Judee Burgoon, Charles Berger, and Vincent Waldron were three of the first researchers to plan a way of envisioning mindfulness and interpersonal communication.⁵⁸ As with the trouble of defining mindfulness, there are different perspectives on what mindful communication is as well. Let's look at three fairly distinct definitions:

1. “Communication that is planful, effortfully processed, creative, strategic, flexible, and/or reason-based (as opposed to emotion-based) would seem to qualify as mindful, whereas communication that is reactive, superficially processed, routine, rigid, and emotional would fall toward the mindless end of the continuum.”⁵⁹
2. “Mindful communication including mindful speech and deep listening are important. But we must not overlook the role of compassion, wisdom, and critical thinking in communication. We must be able empathize with others to see things from their perspective. We should not continue with our narrow prejudices so that we can start meaningful relationships with others. We can then come more easily to agreement and work together.”⁶⁰
3. “Mindful communication includes the practice of mindful presence and encompasses the attributes of a nonjudgmental approach to [our interactions], staying actively present in the moment, and being able to rapidly adapt to change in an interaction.”⁶¹

As you can see, these perspectives on mindful communication align nicely with the discussion we had in the previous section related to mindfulness. However, there is not a single approach to what is “mindful communication.” Each of these definitions can help us create an idea of what mindful communication is. For our purposes within this text, we plan on taking a broad view of mindful communication that encompasses both perspectives of secular mindfulness and non-secular mindfulness (primarily stemming from the Buddhist tradition). As such, we define **mindful communi-**

cation as the process of interacting with others while engaging in mindful awareness and practice. Although more general than the definitions presented above, we believe that aligning our definition with mindful awareness and practice is beneficial because of Shapiro and Carlson’s existing mindfulness framework.⁶²

However, we do want to raise one note about the possibility of mindful communication competence. From a communication perspective, it’s entirely possible to be mindful and not effective in one’s communication. Burgoon, Berger, and Waldron wrote, “without the requisite communication skills to monitor their actions and adapt their messages, without the breadth of repertoire that enables flexible, novel thought processes to translate into creative action, a more mindful state may not lead to more successful communication.”⁶³ As such, there has to be a marriage between mindfulness and communication skills. This book aims to provide a perspective that enhances both mindfulness and interpersonal communication skills.

Key Takeaways

- Mindfulness has many definitions, but it involves being intentionally present in the moment with openness and non-judgment. It can be understood through both Eastern spiritual traditions and Western scientific approaches.
- Mindful awareness refers to being consciously present with your thoughts, emotions, and surroundings, while mindful practice involves developing skills like focused attention, clarity of purpose, and an open, accepting mindset.
- Shapiro and Carlson’s mindfulness model includes three components:
 - Attention: focusing on present experiences
 - Intention: understanding the purpose behind actions
 - Attitude: approaching each moment with curiosity and compassion
- The five facets of mindfulness are:
 - Observing internal and external experiences
 - Describing those experiences using words
 - Acting with awareness instead of autopilot
 - Non-judging one’s inner experience
 - Nonreactivity to thoughts and emotions
- Mindful communication involves applying mindfulness to interactions with others. Being fully present, open, and intentional in conversations helps foster better interpersonal relationships and contributes to effective communication.

Exercises

1. If you haven't already tried mindful coloring, please take this opportunity to try it out. Give yourself 10 to 15 minutes in a quiet space to just sit and focus on the coloring. Try not to let yourself get disturbed by other things in your environment. Just focus on being present with your colors and the coloring sheet.
2. Want to try something deeper in mindfulness? Consider starting simple meditation. Meditating is an important facet of mindfulness, and not one that is specifically religious at all. In fact, most religious traditions have a meditation practice built into the religion. Even atheists can meditate. Try a simple meditation like:

Seated Breath Meditation: This technique can help you: enhance mental clarity, be fully present in the moment, understand your inner emotional state, and feel grounded.

Find a quiet place. Light a candle if you wish. Sit tall in your chair, feet on the floor, or sit comfortably on the floor. Align your spine, shoulders over hips, as if suspended from above. Hands can be in your lap or on your thighs, palms up, or pressed palms together at your heart. Feel your posture as both rooted and energetic. Eyes can be closed or softly focused. Mouth is closed, tongue relaxed. Be sure you can breathe comfortably.

Center your awareness on your nostrils, where the air enters and leaves your body. Notice your breath. Begin counting your breaths, returning to one every time a thought intrudes. When thoughts come in, notice them, then let them go. Bring yourself back to your physical body, to the breath coming in and out.

Source: Thousand Waves Martial Arts & Self Defense Center (thousand-waves.org)

1. Want to try some longer meditation practices? [The Free Mindfulness Project](#) has links to several mindfulness audio files.

Key Terms

acting with awareness

attitude

attention

cognitive complexity

communication	mediated communication
communication competence	mindful awareness
connotative definitions	mindful communication
denotative definitions	mindful practice
describing	non-judging of inner experience
effective communication	nonreactivity to inner experience
group	observing
intrapersonal communication	public communication
intention	self-monitoring
interpersonal communication	symbol

Chapter Wrap-Up

In this chapter, we explored why it's important to study human communication, the basic principles of human communication, the nature of communication competence, the types of human communication, and mindful communication. We hope this chapter makes you interested in staying with us throughout the rest of the book as we explore interpersonal communication.

Chapter Exercises

Real-World Case Study

Noam is a freshman in college and doesn't understand why he needs to take a communication studies course. He doesn't see the importance or application of this course. He wants to be an engineer. His math and engineering classes are more exciting than a communications course. He has been talking his whole life and is very popular. Can you convince him why communication is important for Noam?

End-of-Chapter Assessment

1. Which of the following are reasons for studying communication?
 - a. to increase our effectiveness
 - b. gives us a new perspective
 - c. because we spend so much time doing it

- d. a and b
 - e. all of the above
2. My mother told me that I would succeed at anything I put my mind to and that I could achieve anything. Which type of need is this example?
 - a. physical
 - b. practical
 - c. identity
 - d. social
 - e. affectionate
 3. Communication is all the following except:
 - a. purposeful
 - b. contains a relationship dimension
 - c. contains a content dimension
 - d. culturally determined
 - e. assumed
 4. An individual at a concert flashes a friend the “peace sign” using her index and middle finger to form the letter “v.” This is an example of what?
 - a. a sign
 - b. a word
 - c. mediated communication
 - d. an emoji
 - e. a symbol
 5. Which type of communication involves the exchange of messages between two people?
 - a. intrapersonal
 - b. interpersonal
 - c. small group
 - d. public
 - e. mass

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Chapter 2: Overview of Interpersonal Communication



“Men talking in the cold” by [Anna Vander Stel](#) from [Unsplash](#)

Cardi and Tilly have been friends since they were both in kindergarten. They are both applying to the same college, hoping to be roommates. However, Cardi gets accepted, but Tilly does not. Cardi is crushed because she wanted to share her college experience with her best friend. Tilly tells Cardi to go without her, and she will try again next year after attending the local junior college for a semester. Cardi is no longer as excited to go to college because she is worried about Tilly. Cardi discusses different options with her parents and other friends and posts about it on social media. This idea of sharing our experiences, whether positive or negative, is a form of interpersonal communication. When we share information with others and they share information with us, it is defined as interpersonal communication.

Interpersonal communication can be informal (such as in the checkout line) or formal (such as in a lecture classroom). Often, interpersonal communication occurs in face-to-face contexts. It is usually unplanned, spontaneous, and ungrammatical. Consider the conversations you have with your

friends and family. These are mainly interpersonal in nature. It is essential to learn about interpersonal communication because this is the type of communication that you will be doing for most of your life. At most colleges, public speaking is a required course. Yet, most people will not engage in making a public speech for most their lives, but they will communicate with one other person daily, which is interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication can help us achieve our personal and professional goals. In this chapter, you will learn the concepts associated with interpersonal communication and how certain variables can help you achieve your goals.

In this chapter, you will learn about ways to make communication more effective. You will learn about communication models that might influence how a message is sent and/or received. You will also learn about characteristics that influence the message and can cause others not to accept or understand the message that you were trying to send.

Purposes of Interpersonal Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Explain Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and its connection to communication behaviors.
2. Describe how communication facilitates individuals in meeting their personal and relational needs.
3. Discuss how interpersonal communication contributes to the development of self-concept and self-esteem.
4. Explain the role of communication in building and maintaining relationships.
5. Define Uncertainty Reduction Theory and describe the three strategies people use to reduce uncertainty.

Interpersonal communication serves fundamental purposes that are essential to human survival and flourishing. At its core, communication enables us to meet our basic physical, emotional, and social needs, from securing resources for survival to building the relationships that give life meaning and purpose. Through our interactions with others, we not only satisfy these practical needs but also develop our sense of self and learn about the world. Communication allows us to form, build, and maintain the relationships that provide support, companionship, and personal growth throughout our lives. Whether we are seeking to reduce uncertainty about new people we meet, sharing our dreams and aspirations, or simply connecting with others for emotional well-being, interpersonal communication is the vehicle through which we navigate our social world and fulfill our deepest human needs.

Meeting Personal Needs

Communication fulfills our physical, personal, and social needs. Research has shown a powerful link between happiness and communication.¹ In this study, which included over 200 college students, the researchers found that those who reported the highest levels of happiness also had very active social lives. They found no differences between the happiest people and their peers in terms of how much they exercised, took part in religious activities, or engaged in other activities. The study's results noted that having a social life can help people connect with others. We can connect with others through effective communication. Overall, effective communication is essential to our emotional well-being and our perceptions of life.

Everyone has dreams they want to achieve. What would happen if you told no one about your dreams? Would it really be possible to achieve your dreams without communication? To make your dreams a reality, we will interact with several people along the way who can help you fulfill your dreams and personal needs. The most famous people in history, who were actors, musicians, politicians, and business leaders, all started with a vision and could articulate those ideas to someone else who could help them launch their careers.

There are practical needs for communication. In every profession, excellent communication skills are a necessity. Doctors, nurses, and other health professionals need to listen to their patients to understand their concerns and medical issues. In turn, these health professionals must be able to communicate the appropriate type of treatment and procedures so that their patients feel confident in the best possible outcome, and they will comply with these medical orders.

Research has shown that couples who engage in effective communication report more happiness than couples who do not.² Communication is not an easy skill for everyone. As you read further, you will see that numerous considerations and variables can affect how a message is relayed and received.

As the arrow in Figure 2.1 shows, Maslow believed human needs emerge in order, starting from the bottom of the pyramid. At a basic level, humans must have *their physiological* needs met, including breathing, food, water, sex, homeostasis, sleep, and excretion. Once the physiological needs have been met, humans can attempt to meet *safety* needs, which include the safety of the body, family, resources, morality, health, and employment. A higher-order need that must be met is *love and belonging*, which encompasses friendship, sexual intimacy, and family. Another higher-order need that must be met before self-actualization is *esteem*, which encompasses self-esteem, confidence, achievement, respect from others, and the respect others have for us. Maslow argued that all the lower needs were necessary to help us achieve psychological health and eventually self-actualization.³ Self-actualization leads to creativity, morality, spontaneity, problem-solving, lack of prejudice, and acceptance of facts.

Did you or someone you know benefit from free or reduced breakfast and lunch programs at schools? Have you ever donated to “backpack” programs collecting nonperishable snacks for children to take home to have food for the evening or the weekend? One of the author’s universities is hosting a “Pudding Cup Drive” to support local children with the goal of collecting 450 pudding cups by the end of the semester. The donations are to provide weekend meals for local students in

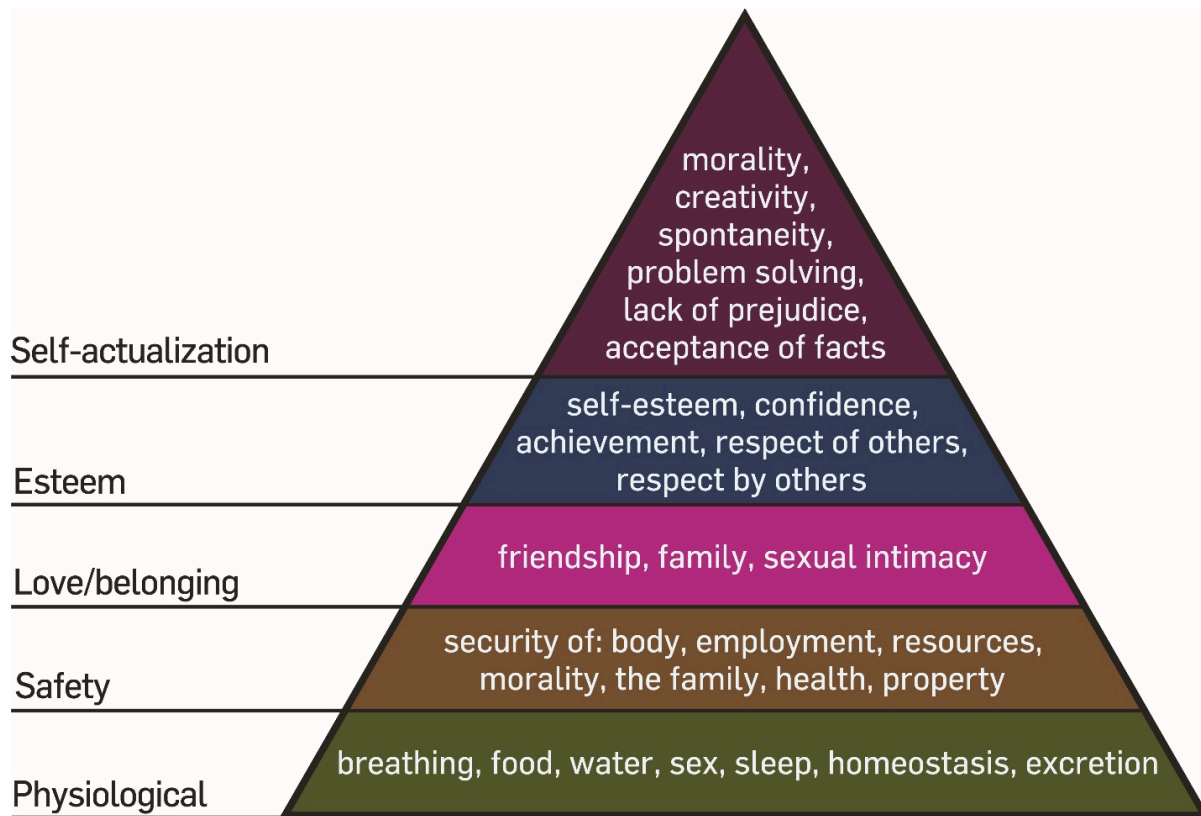


Figure 2.1 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

need through a national program called Blessings in a Backpack. Consider the reasons we feed children. Children who are hungry cannot learn and no child should face food insecurity in their home.

Communicating and Meeting Personal Needs

As you will learn from reading this chapter, it is essential to understand people and recognize that they often communicate to satisfy their needs, but each person's need level is unique. To survive, physiological and safety needs must be met. Through communication, humans can work together to grow food, produce food, build shelter, create safe environments, and engage in protective behaviors. Once physiological and safety needs have been met, communication can then shift to the needs of love and belonging. Instead of focusing on living to see the next day, humans can focus on building relationships by discussing, perhaps, the value of a friendship or the desire for sexual intimacy. After creating a sense of love and belonging, humans can move forward to working on "esteem." Communication may involve sharing praise, working toward goals, and discussing strengths, which may lead to positive self-esteem. When esteem has been addressed and met, humans can achieve self-actualization. Communication will be about making life better, sharing innovative ideas, contributions to society, compassion and understanding, and providing insight to others. Imagine trying to communicate creatively about a novel or express compassion for others while starving and feeling unprotected. The problem of starvation must be resolved before communication can shift to areas addressed within self-actualization.

Critics of Maslow's theory argue that the hierarchy may not be absolute, as it is possible to achieve self-actualization without meeting the lower needs.⁴ For example, a parent/guardian might put the needs of the child first if food is scarce. Here, the need for food has not been fully met, and yet the parent/guardian can engage in self-actualized behavior. Other critics point out that Maslow's hierarchy is rather Western-centric and focused on more individualistic cultures (the focus is on the individual needs and desires) and not applicable to cultures that are collectivistic (the focus is on the family, group, or culture's needs and desires).⁵

It is essential to understand others' needs because they may differ from our own. This can influence how a message is received. For instance, Shaun and Dee have been dating for some time. Dee wants to talk about wedding plans and the possibility of having children. However, Shaun is struggling to make ends meet. He is focused on his paycheck and where he will get money to cover his rent and what his next meal will be because of his tight income. It is very hard for Shaun to talk about their future together and future plans when he is so focused on his basic physiological needs for food and water. Dee is on a different level, in terms of love and belonging, because she doesn't have to worry about finances. Communicating can be difficult when two people have very different needs that are not being met. This can frustrate both Dee and Shaun. Dee feels like Shaun doesn't love her because he refuses to talk about their future together. Shaun is upset with Dee because she doesn't seem to understand how difficult it is for him to manage such a tight budget. If we are not able to understand the other person's needs, then we won't be able to have meaningful conversations.

Learning About Self and Others

Communication is powerful, and sometimes words can affect us in ways we might not have imagined. Think back to a time when someone said something hurtful or insightful to you. How did it make you feel? Did you feel empowered to prove that person wrong or right? Even in a classroom, peers can say things that might make you reconsider how you feel about yourself.

Classmates offer a great deal of feedback to one another. They may comment on how well one particular student does, and this contributes to the student's **self-concept**. The student might think, "People think I am a good student, so I must be." When we interact with others, how they perceive and relate to us affects our overall self-concept. According to René M. Dailey, adolescents' self-concepts are impacted by daily conversations that include both acceptance and challenges.⁶

In high school, peers can be more influential than family members. Some peers can say very hurtful things and make you think poorly of yourself. And then, some peers believe in you and make you feel supported in your ideas. These interactions shape us into the people we are today.

Discovering Self-Concept – Who are you?

To determine your self-concept, address the following questions, and ask others to answer the questions about you.

Questions:

- Where did you grow up?
- What did you enjoy doing as a child?
- What qualities did others recognize in you as you grew up? (ex. “I know I can rely on you.” Or, “You are good at making people laugh.”)
- When you are with a group of people, what is your role in the group? (Ex. listening, coordinating meeting times and location, initiating getting together).

Why do you think you communicate the way you do? Is it based on some answers to these self-reflexive questions? Sometimes, people behave and interact with others because of their experiences, background, and/or observations of others.

On a job interview, if someone asks you to tell them about yourself, how would you describe yourself? The words that you use are related to your self-concept. Self-concept refers to the perceptions that you view about yourself. These perceptions are relatively stable. These might include your preferences, talents, emotional states, pet peeves, and beliefs.

Self-esteem is a part of self-concept. Self-esteem includes judgments of self-worth. A person can experience varying levels of self-esteem, ranging from high to low evaluations. Individuals with high self-esteem felt positive about themselves and others. They will mainly focus on their successes and believe that others’ comments are helpful.

People with low self-esteem will view things negatively and may focus more on their failures. They are more likely to take other people’s comments as criticism or hostility. A recent study found that individuals with low self-esteem prefer indirect communication methods, such as email or text, over face-to-face interactions, compared to those with high self-esteem.⁷

Building and Maintaining Relationships

Research shows that your self-concept doesn’t happen when you are born.⁸ Rather, it happens over time. When you are very young, you are still learning about your body. Some children’s songs talk about head, shoulders, knees, and toes. As you develop into an adult, you learn more about yourself with others. It is through this communication with others that we not only learn about ourselves, but we can also build and maintain relationships. To initiate a relationship with someone else, we might ask them very general questions, such as their favorite color or movie. Once we have established a connection, we might invite them to coffee or lunch. As we spend time with others, we learn more about them through conversation, and in the process, we discover our likes and dislikes about someone. It is through this sharing of information with others that we learn more about them. We can build intimacy and a deeper connection with others when they share more about their experiences and perspectives.

Think about all the relationships that you have developed over time. Now think about how these people either shaped your self-concept or perceptions regarding your self-esteem. For instance, you

may have had a coach or teacher who impacted how you learn about a certain topic. You may have had an inspirational teacher who helped you find your career path, or you might have had a coach who constantly embarrassed you in front of your teammates by yelling at you. These two very different experiences can significantly impact how you perceive yourself.

We receive messages from people throughout our lives. On social media, there will be people who like our posts, but there might be some who disagree or do not like what we post. These experiences can help us understand what we value and what things we may choose to ignore.

From an early age, we might compare ourselves to others. This is called social comparison. For instance, in grade school, your teacher might have asked everyone to line up against the wall to see who is the tallest and who is the shortest. Instinctively, we already compare ourselves to others. When there is an exam, students want to know how other people performed on the exam to see if they are different or similar. By comparing ourselves to others, we can discern whether we are better or worse than others, which in turn can influence our self-esteem. One of the female authors use to compare herself in weight and height to her two female cousins when she was a child. She remembers taking great pride in weighing more than her cousins when she was in fifth grade. From the perspective of an innocent child weighing more was better. Life shapes our ideals and values. Now, she would love to weigh less than others her size and age.

We will build and maintain relationships with others who share similar self-concepts to us, or who we perceive as having a similar self-concept about ourselves. Your closest friends are typically people who share some similarities with you. These relationships most likely occurred because you disclosed information about yourself to see if you were similar or compatible with the other person.

Uncertainty Reduction Theory

As humans habitually form relationships, theorists Charles Berger and Richard Calabrese⁹ sought to understand how humans begin relationships. Their research focused on the initiation of relationships, and it was observed that humans, in first meetings, attempt to reduce uncertainty. Thus, the **Uncertainty Reduction theory** emerged. This theory addressed cognitive uncertainty (uncertainty associated with the beliefs and attitudes of another) and behavioral uncertainty (uncertainty regarding how another person might behave). Three strategies are used to reduce uncertainty, including passive, active, and interactive strategies. Passive strategies avoid disrupting the other individual and can be accomplished through observation. Active strategies involve asking a friend for information or observing social networking sites such as Facebook, X, and Instagram. Finally, interactive strategies involve direct contact with the other individual.

Charles Berger and Richard Calabrese (1975) believed that when we meet new people, we are fraught with uncertainty about the new relationship and will seek to reduce this uncertainty and its resulting anxiety.¹⁰ They found that the best and most common way of reducing this uncertainty is through self-disclosure. As such, self-disclosure needs to be reciprocal to reduce uncertainty successfully. Upon new introductions, we consider three things: (1) the person's ability to reward or punish us, (2) the degree to which they meet or violate our social expectations, and (3) whether we expect to re-encounter them. Most of these considerations are made instantly and often through expectancy biases. Research revealed that we make snap decisions about people upon meeting them based on

previously held beliefs and experiences, and that these decisions are extremely difficult to overcome or change.¹¹ When we meet other people, there is a ton of information for us to go through very quickly, so just as in other situations, we draw on our previous understandings and experiences to make assumptions about this new person. The process of self-disclosure enables us to gather more information, leading to a more accurate understanding of other individuals, which provides us with better insight into their future actions and reduces our uncertainty about them.

These ideas are particularly clear in the digital age, as evident in Chang et al.'s (2015) research on online consumer reviews and their impact on potential purchasers.¹² They found that similarities in a reviewer's diction to the shoppers' language and the confirmation of the shoppers' prior beliefs created more credibility. We are more comfortable with things and people that are like us, and that we understand and can predict. How does this translate to more personal forms of computer-mediated communication (CMC) such as email?

In another study, researchers sought to determine the factors that influence our understanding of such messages.¹³ They found that the individual personality of the receiver was the biggest factor in the way the messages were interpreted. Again, we see that humans interpret data more effectively when they are familiar with it. We will consistently make assumptions based on what we would do or have experienced previously. The lack of nonverbal cues in CMC exacerbates this. We have very little more than text to use in the formation of our opinions and seek to eliminate the uncertainty.

We need to return to the solution that Berger and Calabrese found for reducing uncertainty, self-disclosure. Many new relationships today, particularly in the dating world, begin online. To be successful in these initial encounters, the key appears to be engaging in as much self-disclosure as possible upfront to help others reduce anxiety based on uncertainty. Further research in this area would support the notion that an increase in self-disclosure leads to an increase in positive reactions from similar users in a social network. The underlying issue with all this is that there is little to no way to verify the information disclosed by users. So, a new uncertainty reduction theory seems necessary. How can we alter our previous notions of human behavior to reflect a culture in which deception is presumably so much easier? Is the answer to live in a world of uncertainty and its resulting anxiety? To what degree must we assume the best of others and engage in potentially risky relationships to maintain a functional society? Who can we trust, and how can we know?

Who can we trust?

Twenty-five percent of young adults were seeking love online when two researchers conducted their research, causing them to wonder about how often individuals were lying online. At the time, it was known that males tended to lie about their height in online dating profiles and females tended to lie about weight.



Researchers David Markowitz and Jeff Hancock (2018) wondered, “How often do people who use dating apps lie? What sort of things are they prone to lie about?”¹⁴ They reviewed the messages of 200 participants from an online dating platform during what they defined as “the discovery phase.”

Discovery Phase: This phase is defined as after swiping right and before meeting. We can consider it to be an uncertainty reduction phase.

Lies were discovered in 7% of messages and could be categorized into two types.

Self-Presentation Lies: These lies involved making individuals appear more attractive such as going to church, going to the gym more often, or having similar interest to the person they were chatting with.

Availability Maintenance: Lies in this category involved deception about when individuals were available and making excuses for “radio silence” such as “my phone died.”

In the discover phase when reducing uncertainty, most individuals are not fabricating significant information. The researcher rationalized that to do so would create significant problems going forward.

Key Takeaways

- Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs illustrates that people utilize communication to fulfill both basic needs (e.g., safety, belonging) and higher-order needs (e.g., esteem, self-

actualization). Understanding a person's needs can help explain how and why they communicate.

- Communication helps us meet practical, emotional, and social needs. It supports well-being, helps us express our goals, and allows us to collaborate with others to solve problems and pursue dreams.
- Our self-concept and self-esteem are shaped through feedback from others. Communication with peers, family, and colleagues influences how we see ourselves and can either build or diminish our sense of self-worth.
- We build and maintain relationships through self-disclosure and shared experiences. Communication enables us to connect, discover commonalities, and foster deeper emotional bonds with others over time.
- Uncertainty Reduction Theory explains how people manage uncertainty when forming relationships. The three strategies used are passive (observing), active (seeking information), and interactive (direct engagement). These help us learn about others and reduce anxiety in new interactions.

Exercises

1. Write a list of questions you asked when you first met your college roommate or a new friend. Review these questions and write why these questions are useful to you.
2. Recall a situation in which you were recently carrying on a conversation with another person. Write the details of the conversation. Now, relate the parts of the conversation to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

Elements of Interpersonal Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Define the communication process and explain its cyclical nature.
2. Identify and describe the roles of the sender and receiver in communication.
3. List and explain the components of a communication transaction, including message, channel, feedback, and environment.
4. Name and differentiate the four noises that affect communication.

5. Recognize how mindfulness can help individuals manage distractions in communication.

You may think that communication is easy. However, in your life, communication may be challenging and difficult to understand. We can similarly study communication in the same way we study other systems. There are elements to the communication process that are important to understand. Each interaction typically includes a sender, receiver, message, channel, feedback, and noise. Let's inspect them.

Sender

Humans naturally encode messages, and we rarely consider this part of the process. However, have you ever thought about the exact words that you would use to get a later curfew from your parents/guardians and how you might refute any counterpoints? In that case, you intuitively know that choosing the right words—"encoding"—weighed heavily in your ability to influence your parents/guardians successfully. The language you chose mattered.

The sender is the encoder or **source** of the message. The sender is the person who decides to communicate and the intent of the message. The source may decide to send messages to entertain, persuade, inform, include, or escape. Often, the sources will create a message based on their feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and past experiences. For instance, if you have feelings of affection toward someone but never express those feelings to them, they will never know. The sender can withhold or release information.

Receiver

The transactional model of communication teaches us that we are both the sender and receiver simultaneously. The **receiver(s)** is the individual who decodes the message and tries to understand the source of the message. Receivers have to filter messages based on their attitudes, beliefs, opinions, values, history, and prejudices. People will encode messages through their five senses. We must pay attention to the source of the message to receive it accurately. If the receiver does not receive the message, then communication has not occurred. The receiver needs to obtain a message.

Daily, you will receive several messages. Some of these messages are intentional. And some of these messages will be unintentional. For instance, a person waving in your direction might be waving to someone behind you, but you accidentally think they are waving at you. Some messages will be easy to understand, while others will be difficult to interpret. Every time a person sends a message, they are also receiving messages simultaneously.

Message

Messages encompass a range of textual, verbal, and nonverbal aspects of communication, through which individuals assign meaning. People send messages intentionally (texting a friend to meet for coffee) or unintentionally (accidentally falling asleep during lectures). Messages can be verbal (saying hello to your parents/guardians), nonverbal (hugging your parents/guardians), or text (words on a computer screen). Essentially, communication is the process by which messages create meaning. Yet, meanings differ among people. For instance, a friend of yours promises to repay you for the money they borrowed, and they say “sorry” for not having any money to give you. You might think they were insincere, but another person might think that it was a genuine apology. People can vary in their interpretation of messages.

Channel

With advances in technology, cell phones act as many **channels** of communication at once. Consider that smartphones enable us to make calls and send texts. Also, we can receive communication through Facebook, X, Email, Instagram, Snapchat, Reddit, and Vox. All these channels are in addition to our traditional channels, which were face-to-face communication, letter writing, telegrams, and the telephone. The addition of these new communication channels has changed our lives forever. The channel is the medium in which we communicate our message. Think about breaking up a romantic relationship. Would you rather do it face-to-face or via a text message? Why did you answer the way you did? The channel can affect the message.

Now, think about how you hear important news. Did you learn about it from the Internet, social media, television, a newspaper, or others? The channel is the medium through which you discovered the news.

It may seem like a trivial thing to discuss channels, but a channel can significantly impact how people receive the message. For instance, a true story tells about a professional athlete who proposed marriage to his girlfriend by sending her the ring through the postal mail service. He sent her a ring and a recorded message asking her to marry him. She declined his proposal and refused to return the ring.¹⁵ Here, the channel might have been better if he had asked her face-to-face.

Be mindful of how the channel can affect the way a receiver reacts and responds to your message. For instance, a handwritten love letter might be more romantic than a typed email. If there were some tragic news about your family, you would probably want someone to call you immediately rather than send you a letter.

Overall, people naturally understand that the message influences the channel they might use. In a research study focused on channels, college students were asked to identify the most effective channels for delivering messages.¹⁶ College students said that they would communicate face-to-face if the message was positive, but use mediated channels if the message was negative.

Feedback

Feedback is the response to the message. If there is no feedback, communication would not be effective. Feedback is important because the sender needs to know if the receiver got the message. Simultaneously, the receiver usually will give the sender some message that they comprehend what has been said. If there is no feedback or if it seems that the receiver did not understand the message, then it is negative feedback. However, if the receiver understood the message, then it is positive feedback. Positive feedback does not mean that the receiver entirely agrees with the sender of the message, but the message was comprehended. Sometimes, feedback is neither positive nor negative; it can be ambiguous. Examples of ambiguous feedback might include saying “hmmm” or “interesting.” Based on these responses, it is unclear whether the receiver of the message understood a part of or the entire message. It is essential to note that feedback doesn’t have to come from others. Sometimes, we can be critical of our own words when we write them in a text or say them out loud. We may refine our words and adjust our communication style based on our internal feedback.

Environment

The context or situation where communication occurs and affects the experience is referred to as the **environment**. We know that the way you communicate in a professional context may differ from how you communicate in a personal context. You probably won’t talk to your boss the same way you would talk to your best friend. (An exception might be if your best friend were also your boss). The environment can significantly impact how you communicate. For instance, in a library, you might talk more quietly than normal so that you don’t disturb other library patrons. However, in a nightclub or bar, you might speak louder than normal because of the other people talking, music, or noise. Hence, the environment makes a difference in how you communicate with others.

It is also important to note that environments can be related to fields of experience, a person’s past experiences, or background. For instance, a town hall meeting that plans to cut primary access to lower socioeconomic residents might be perceived differently by individuals who use these services and those who do not. Environments might overlap, but sometimes they do not. Some people in college have had many family members who attended the same school, while others do not have any family members who have ever attended college.

Noise

Anything that interferes with the message is called **noise**. Noise keeps the message from being completely understood by the receiver. If noise is absent, then the message will be accurate. However, usually, noise affects the message. Noise can be physical (e.g., television, cell phone, fan) or psychological (e.g., thinking about your parents/guardians, or missing someone you love). Noise is anything that hinders or distorts the message.

There are four types of noise. The first type is physical noise. This is noise that comes from a physical object. For instance, people talking, birds chirping, a jackhammer pounding concrete, or a car revving by are all different physical noises.

The second type of noise is psychological noise. This is a noise that no one else can hear unless they are a mind reader. It is the noise that occurs in a person's mind, such as frustration, anger, happiness, or depression. When you talk to a person, they might act and behave as if nothing is wrong, but deep inside their mind, they may be dealing with many other issues or problems. Hence, psychological noise is hard to perceive or understand because it occurs in the other person's mind.

The third type of noise is semantic noise, which deals with language. This could refer to jargon, accents, or the use of language. Sometimes our messages are not understood by others because of the words we choose. For instance, if a person used the word "lit," it would probably depend on the other words accompanying the word "lit" and on the context. To say that "this party is lit" would mean something different compared to "he lit a cigarette." If you were coming from another country, that word might mean something different. Hence, sometimes language-related problems, where the receiver can't understand the message, are referred to as semantic noise.

The fourth and last type of noise is called physiological noise. This type of noise is because the receiver's body interferes with or hinders the acceptance of a message. For instance, if the person is blind, they cannot see any written messages you might send. If the person is deaf, then they cannot hear any spoken messages. If the person is starving, then they might pay more attention to their hunger than any other message.

Mindfulness Activity



We live in a world where there is constant noise. Practice being mindful of sound. Find a secluded spot and close your eyes. Focus on the surrounding sounds. Do you notice certain sounds more than others? Why? Is it because you place more importance on those sounds compared to other sounds?

Sounds can be helpful in your mindfulness practice.¹⁷ Some people prefer paying attention to sounds rather than their breath when meditating. This activity tests if you can discern some sounds more than others. Some people might find these sounds noisy and very distracting. Others might find the sounds calming and relaxing.

If you watch old episodes of Superman, you might see scenes where he has to concentrate on hearing the sounds of someone calling for help. Superman can filter all the other sounds in the world to figure out where he needs to focus his attention.

There will be many times in life when you will be distracted because you might be overwhelmed by all the noise. It is essential to take a few minutes to be mindful of the noise and how you can manage all the distractions. Once you are aware of the things that trigger these distractions or noise, you will be more focused and a better communicator.

Key Takeaways

- Communication is a process because people are both sending and receiving messages simultaneously. Feedback helps confirm understanding and allows the interaction to continue in a meaningful way.
- The sender encodes and initiates the message with purpose and intent, while the receiver decodes and interprets the message based on personal experiences, context, and filters like beliefs or past interactions.
- The core components of communication include the sender, receiver, message (what is being communicated), channel (how it is delivered), feedback (response), environment (context), and noise (anything that interferes with understanding).
- The four types of noise are:
 - Physical noise (external distractions like sounds)
 - Psychological noise (internal thoughts and emotions)
 - Semantic noise (language misunderstandings)
 - Physiological noise (bodily factors like hearing loss or fatigue)
- Practicing mindfulness—such as focusing on sounds or the present moment—can improve listening and help reduce internal and external distractions that interfere with effective communication.

Exercises

1. Think of your most recent communication with another individual. Write this conversation, and within the conversation, identify the components of the communication process.
2. Consider the various noises that impact communication. Can you list some examples of how noise can make communication worse?
3. Consider the advantages and disadvantages of various channels. List the pros and cons of the different channels of communication.

Perception Process

Learning Objectives

1. Define perception and explain how it influences interpersonal communication.
2. Identify and describe the three stages of the perception process: attending, organizing, and interpreting.
3. List and explain the factors that influence how we attend to sensory information.
4. Name and define the four perceptual schemas used to organize information.
5. Describe five common influences that affect how people interpret others' behavior.

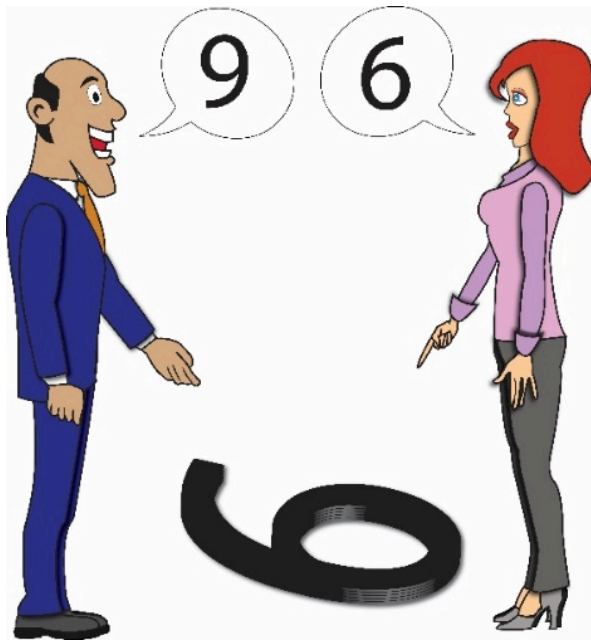


Figure 2.2 It's All About Perception

As the illustration shows, it is essential to ensure that you perceive things in the same way as the other person. Put yourself in their shoes and see it from their perspective before jumping to conclusions or getting upset. That person might have a legitimate reason they are not willing to concede to you.

As you can see from the picture, how you view something is also how you will describe and define it. Your perception of something will determine how you feel about it and how you will communicate about it. In the picture above, do you see it as a six or a nine? Why did you answer the way you did?

Your perceptions shape who you are, and your experiences and personal preferences influence them. If you have a horrible experience with a restaurant, you probably won't go to that restaurant in the future. You might even tell others not to go to that restaurant based on your personal experience. Thus, it is crucial to understand how perceptions can influence others.

Sometimes the silliest arguments occur with others because we don't understand their perceptions of things.

Perception

Many of our problems in the world occur due to **perception**, or acquiring, interpreting, and organizing information that comes in through our five senses. When we don't have all the facts, it's hard to make a concrete decision. We have to rely on our perceptions to understand the situation. In

this section, you will learn tools that can help you understand perceptions and improve your communication skills. As you will see in many of the illustrations on perception, people can see different things. In some pictures, some individuals might only see one image, while others may see both, and a small number might perceive something completely different from the rest of the class.

Many famous artists over the years have played with people's perceptions. Figure 2.3 is an example of three artists' use of twisted perceptions. The first image, created by Danish psychologist Edgar Rubin, is commonly known as the Rubin Vase. Essentially, it appears to be either a vase (the white part) or two people looking at each other (the black part). This simple image represents both images and neither image at the same time. The second work of art is Charles Allan Gilbert's (1892) painting "All is Vanity." In this painting, a woman is shown staring at herself in the mirror, while simultaneously, the image also depicts a giant skull. Lastly, we have William Ely Hill's (1915) "My Wife and My Mother-in-Law," which may have been loosely based on an 1888 German postcard. In Hill's painting, two different images are presented: one of a young woman and one of an older woman. The painting was initially published in an American humor magazine called *Puck*. The caption "They are both in this picture — Find them" accompanied the image. These visual representations serve as helpful reminders that we do not always perceive things the same way as those around us. There are often multiple ways to view and understand the same set of events.

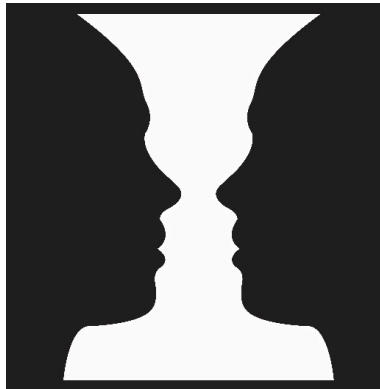


Figure 2.3a The Rubin Vase – based on Edgar John Rubin's (1915) "Vase Ambiguous Figure"

When it comes to interpersonal communication, each time you talk to other people, you present a side of yourself. Sometimes this presentation is a true representation of yourself, and at other times, it may be a false version of yourself. People present themselves as they want others to see them. Some people present themselves positively on social media, and they have wonderful relationships. Then, their followers or fans get shocked to learn that those images are not true to what is presented. If we only see one side of things, we might be surprised to learn that the situation is different. In this section, we will learn that the perception process has three stages: attending, organizing, and interpreting.

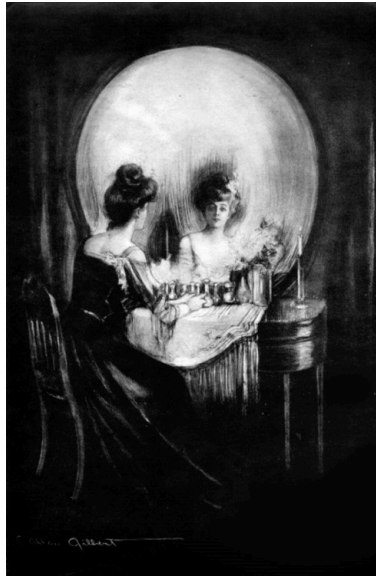


Figure 2.3b Charles Allan Gilbert (1892) “All is Vanity”



Figure 2.3c William Ely Hill (1915) “My Wife and My Mother-in-Law”

Attending

The first step of the perception process is to select the information you want to pay attention to or focus on, which is called **attending**. You will pay attention to things based on how they look, feel, smell, touch, and taste. At every moment, you are obtaining a large amount of information. So, how do you decide what to pay attention to and what to ignore? People pay attention to things that matter to them. Usually, we pay attention to things that are louder, larger, different, and more complex than what we ordinarily view.

When we focus on a particular thing and ignore other elements, it is known as selective perception. For instance, when you are in love, you might pay attention only to that special someone and not notice anything else. The same thing happens when we end a relationship; when we are devastated, we might notice how everyone else seems to be in a great relationship, but we are not.

There are several reasons you pay attention to certain things more than others.

The first reason we pay attention to something is that it is extreme or intense. It stands out from the crowd and captures our attention, like an extremely good-looking person at a party or a big neon sign in a dark, isolated town. We can't help but notice these things because they are exceptional or extraordinary.

Second, we pay attention to things that are different or contradictory. Commonly, when people enter an elevator, they face the doors. Imagine if someone entered the elevator and stood with their back to the doors, staring at you. You might pay more attention to this person than to others because the behavior is unusual. It is something that you don't expect, which makes it stand out to you even more. On another note, 'different' could also refer to something you are not accustomed to or something that no longer exists for you. For instance, if someone very close to you has passed away, you might pay more attention to the loss of that person than to anything else. Some people grieve for an extended period because they were so accustomed to having that person around, and things can feel different now that they are no longer there to rely on or ask for input.

The third factor that influences our attention is repetition. Think of a catchy song or a commercial that continually repeats itself. We might be more alert to it since it repeats, compared to something that was only said once. If we hear something over and over, then we are likely to remember it but also pay attention to it. For Another example might be if your mom always says she loves you when she sees you, then you are more likely to remember it and pay attention to it because she always says it to you. It would be odd if she didn't say it to you, because you are used to that repetitious saying.

The fourth factor that influences our attention is our motives. If we have a motive to find a romantic partner, we might be more perceptive of attractive people than usual because we are looking for romantic interests. Another motive might be to lose weight; in this case, you might pay more attention to exercise advertisements and food selection choices compared to someone who does not have this motive. Our motives influence what we pay attention to and what we ignore.

The last factor that influences our selection process is our emotional state. If we are in an angry mood, we may be more sensitive to things that irritate us. Conversely, when we are in a happy mood, we are more likely to overlook negativity because we are already in a positive state. Selecting does not involve just paying attention to certain cues; it also means that you might overlook other things. For instance, people in love will think their partner is amazing and overlook many of their flaws. This is normal behavior. We are so focused on how wonderful they are that we often neglect the negative aspects of their behavior.

Organizing

Look again at the three images in Figure 2.3. What were the first things that you saw when you looked at each picture? Could you see the two different images? Which image was more prominent?

When we examine a picture or image, we engage in **organizing** it in our head to make sense of it and define it. This is an example of organization. After we select the information that we are paying attention to, we have to make sense of it in our brains. This stage of the perception process is referred to as organization. We must understand that the information can be organized in different ways. After we attend to something, our brains quickly want to make sense of this data. We quickly want to understand the information that we are exposed to and organize it in a way that makes sense to us.

There are four types of schemes that people use to organize perceptions.¹⁸ First, physical constructs are used to classify people (e.g., young/old; tall/short; big/small). Second, role constructs are social positions (e.g., mother, friend, lover, doctor, teacher). Third, interaction constructs are the social behaviors displayed in the interaction (e.g., aggressive, friendly, dismissive, indifferent). Fourth, psychological constructs are the dispositions, emotions, and internal states of mind of the communicators (e.g., depressed, confident, happy, insecure). We often use these schemes to better understand and organize the information that we have received. We use these schemes to generalize others and to classify information.

Let's pretend that you came to class and noticed that one of your classmates was wildly waving their arms in the air at you. This will most likely catch your attention because you find this behavior strange. Then, you will try to organize or make sense of what is happening. Once you have organized it in your brain, you will need to interpret the behavior.

Interpreting

The final stage of the perception process is **interpreting**. In this stage of perception, you're attaching meaning to understand the data. So, after you select information and organize things in your brain, interpret the situation. As previously discussed in the above example, your friend waves their hands wildly (attending), and you're trying to figure out what they're communicating to you (organizing). You will attach meaning (interpreting). Does your friend need help and are they trying to get your attention, or do they want you to watch out for something behind you?

We interpret the behavior of others daily. Walking to class, you might see an attractive stranger smiling at you. You could interpret this as flirtatious behavior or simply someone being friendly. Scholars have identified some factors that influence our interpretations:¹⁹

Personal Experience

First, personal experience affects our interpretation of events. What prior experiences have you had that affect your perceptions? Maybe you heard from your friends that a particular restaurant was really good, but when you went there, you had a horrible experience and decided you never wanted to go there again. Even though your friends might try to persuade you to try it again, you might be inclined not to go because your experience with that restaurant wasn't good.

Another example might be a traumatic relationship breakup. You might have had a relational partner who cheated on you and left you with trust issues. You might find another romantic interest,

but in the back of your mind, you might be cautious and interpret loving behaviors differently because you don't want to be hurt again.

Involvement

Second, involvement affects your interpretation. The more involved or deeper your relationship is with another person, the more likely you will interpret their behavior differently compared to someone you don't know well. For instance, let's pretend that you're a manager, and two of your employees come to work late. One worker happens to be your best friend, and the other is someone who has just started and you don't know them well. You're more likely to interpret your best friend's behavior more altruistically than the other worker because you've known your best friend for a longer period. Besides, since this person is your best friend, this implies that you interact with and are more involved with them compared to other friends.

Expectations

Third, the expectations we hold can influence the way we interpret other people's behaviors. For instance, if you overheard some friends talking about a mean professor and how hostile they are in class, you might expect this to be true. Let's say you meet the professor and attend their class; you might still have certain expectations about them based on what you heard. Even if those expectations might be completely false, you might still expect those allegations to be true.

Assumptions

Fourth, there are assumptions about human behavior. Imagine if you're a personal fitness trainer: do you believe people like to exercise or need to exercise? Your answer to that question might be based on your assumptions. If you're someone who is inclined to exercise, you might think that everyone likes to work out. However, if you don't want to exercise but know that people should be physically fit, then you would be more likely to agree with the statement that people need to exercise. Your assumptions about humans can shape how you interpret their behavior. Another example is that if you believe most people would donate to a worthy cause, you might be surprised to learn that not everyone shares this view. When we assume all humans should act a certain way, we're more likely to interpret their behavior differently if they don't respond in that certain way.

Relational Satisfaction

Fifth, relational satisfaction will cause you to see things in a very different light. Relational satisfaction refers to the degree of satisfaction or happiness you experience in your current relationship. If you're content, then you're more likely to view all your partner's behaviors as thoughtful and kind. However, if you're not satisfied in your relationship, then you're more likely to view their

behavior as distrustful or insincere. Research has shown that unhappy couples are more likely to blame their partners when things go wrong compared to happy couples.²⁰

Conclusion

In this section, we've discussed the three stages of perception: attending, organizing, and interpreting. The stages can occur out of sequence. For example, if your parent/guardian had a bad experience at a car dealership based on their interpretation (such as "They overcharged me for the car and they added all these hidden fees."), then the experience can influence their future selection (looking for credible and highly-rated car dealerships). Then your parent/guardian can organize the information (car dealers are just trying to make money, the assumption is that they think most customers don't know a lot about cars). Perception is a continuous process, and it's very hard to determine the start and finish of any perceptual differences.

Key Takeaways

- Perception is acquiring, interpreting, and organizing information through the senses, and it strongly shapes how we understand and communicate with others.
- The three stages of the perception process are:
 - Attending (focusing on specific sensory input),
 - Organizing (making sense of what we notice),
 - Interpreting (assigning meaning to what we've observed).
- People are more likely to attend to information that is intense, different, repeated, aligned with personal motives, or connected to their emotional state.
- Individuals organize sensory input using four perceptual schema:
 - Physical constructs (appearance),
 - Role constructs (social roles),
 - Interaction constructs (behavior patterns),
 - Psychological constructs (internal states and emotions).
- How we interpret others' behavior is influenced by:
 - Personal experience,
 - Level of involvement,
 - Expectations,
 - Assumptions about people, and
 - Satisfaction in our relationships.

Exercises

1. Take a walk to a place you usually go to on campus or in your neighborhood. Before taking your walk, mentally list everything you will see along the way. As you walk, note everything on your path. What new things do you notice now that you are deliberately “attending” to your environment?
2. What affects your perception? Reflect on your origins and self-concept. How do these two factors impact how you see the world?
3. Look back at a previous text or email that you got from a friend. After reading it, do you have a different interpretation of it now compared to when you first got it? Why? Think about how interpretation can affect communication if you didn’t know this person. How does it differ?

Models of Interpersonal Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Define the purpose of using models in the study of interpersonal communication.
2. Identify the core features of action models, including examples like the Shannon-Weaver and SMCR models.
3. Describe the interactional model of communication and how it differs from action models.
4. Explain the components and characteristics of transactional models of communication.
5. Identify the key features of mindful interpersonal communication and how it expands on the transactional model.

In the world of communication, we have several different models to help us understand what communication is and how it works. A **model** is a simplified representation of a system (often graphic) that highlights the crucial components and connections of concepts, which are used to help people understand an aspect of the real world. For our purposes, the models have all helped us understand how real-world communication interactions occur. The goal of creating models is three-fold:

1. to facilitate understanding by eliminating unnecessary components,
2. to aid in decision-making by simulating “what if” scenarios, and

3. to explain, control, and predict events based on past observations.²¹

Over the next few paragraphs, we will examine three different models that communication scholars have proposed to help us understand interpersonal interactions: action, interactional, and transactional models.

Action Models

In this section, we will explore various models to enhance our understanding of interpersonal communication. The purpose of using models is to provide visual representations of interpersonal communication and to offer a better understanding of how various scholars have conceptualized it over time. The first type of model we'll be exploring is **action models**, or communication models that view communication as a one-directional transmission of information from a source or sender to some destination or receiver.

Shannon-Weaver Model

Shannon and Weaver were both engineers at the Bell Telephone Laboratories. Their job was to ensure that all telephone cables and radio waves were operating at full capacity. They developed the Shannon-Weaver model, which is also known as the linear communication model (Weaver & Shannon, 1963).²² As indicated by its name, the scholars believed that communication occurred linearly, where a sender encodes a message through a channel to a receiver, who will decode the message. Feedback is not immediate. Examples of linear communication were newspapers, radio, and television.

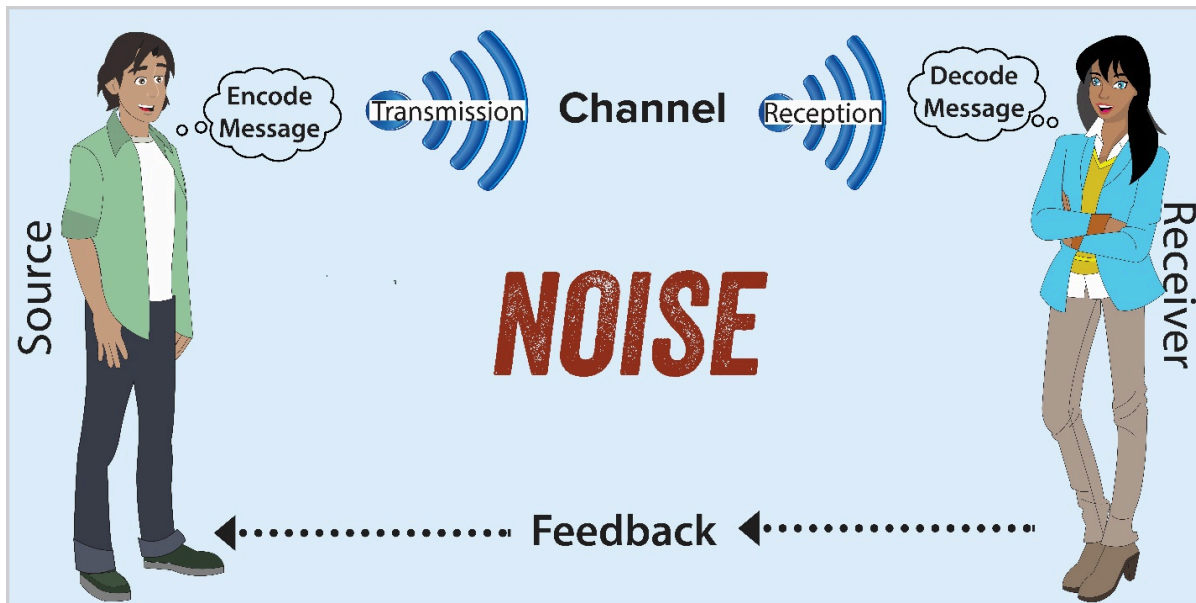


Figure 2.4 Shannon-Weaver Model

Early Schramm Model

The Shannon-Weaver model was criticized because it assumed that communication always occurred in a linear manner. Wilbur Schram (1954) believed it was essential to recognize the impact of messages.²³ Schramm's model regards communication as a process between an encoder and a decoder. Most importantly, this model accounts for how people interpret the message. Schramm argued that a person's background, experience, and knowledge are factors that impact interpretation. Besides, Schramm believed the messages are transmitted through a medium. The decoder will send feedback about the message to show that it has been received. He argued that communication is incomplete unless there is feedback from the receiver. According to Schramm's model, encoding and decoding are vital to effective communication. Any communication where decoding does not occur or feedback does not happen is not effective or complete.

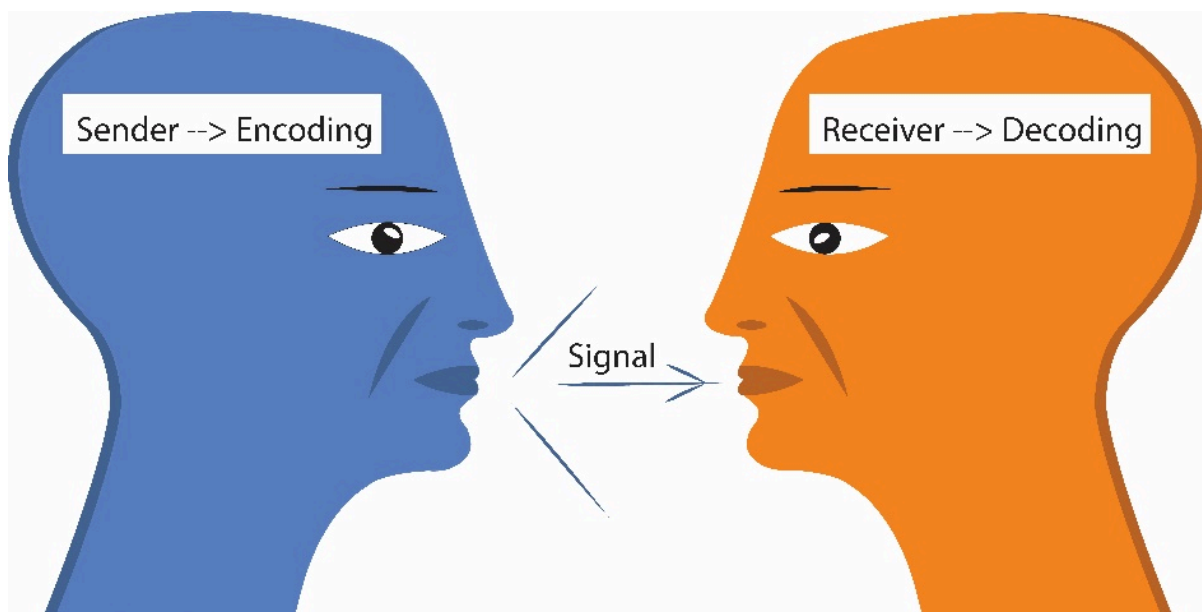


Figure 2.5 Schramm Model

Berlo's SMCR Model

David K. Berlo (1960)²⁴ created the SMCR model of communication. SMCR stands for sender, message, channel, receiver. Berlo's model describes different components of the communication process. He argued that there are three main parts of all communication: the speaker, the subject, and the listener. He maintained the listener determines the meaning of any message.

Regarding the source or sender of the message, Berlo identified factors that influence the message's source. First, communication skills refer to the ability to speak or write. Second, attitude is the person's point of view, which may be influenced by the listener. The third is whether the source has the requisite knowledge on a given topic to be effective. Fourth, social systems include the source's values, beliefs, and opinions, which may influence the message.

Next, we move on to the message portion of the model. The message can be sent in various forms, including text, video, or audio. There might be components that influence the message, such as content, which is the information being sent. Elements refer to the verbal and nonverbal behaviors that

convey how the message is sent. Treatment refers to how the message was presented. The structure is how the message was organized. Code is the form in which the message was sent, such as text, gesture, or music.

The channel of the message relies on the basic five senses of sound, sight, touch, smell, and taste. Think of how your mother might express her love for you. She might hug you (touch) and say, “I love you” (sound), or make you your favorite dessert (taste). Each of these channels is a way of displaying affection.

The receiver is the person who decodes the message. Similar to the models discussed earlier, the receiver is at the end. However, Berlo argued that for the receiver to understand and comprehend the message, there must be similar factors to those of the sender. Hence, the source and the receiver have similar components. Ultimately, the receiver must decode the message and interpret its meaning. Berlo tries to present the model of communication as simply as possible. His model accounts for variables that will obstruct the interpretation of the model.

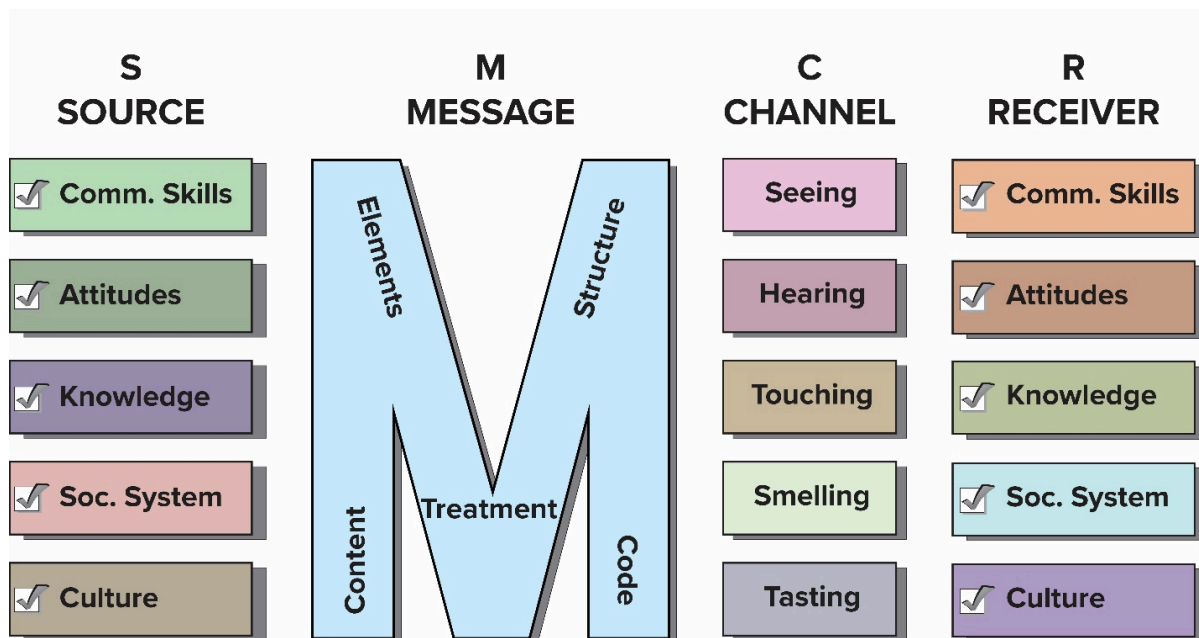


Figure 2.5 SMCR Model

Interaction Models

In this section, we will explore the next evolution of communication models, specifically interaction models. **Interaction models** view the sender and the receiver as responsible for the effectiveness of the communication. One of the most significant differences between the action and interaction models is their heightened focus on feedback.

Osgood and Schramm Model

Osgood-Schramm's model of communication is known as a circular model because it indicates that messages can go in two directions.²⁵ Hence, once a person decodes a message, they can encode

it and send a message back to the sender. They could continue encoding and decoding in a continuous cycle. This revised model indicates that: 1) communication is not linear, but circular; 2) communication is reciprocal and equal; 3) messages are based on interpretation; 4) communication involves encoding, decoding, and interpreting. The benefit of this model is that it illustrates the cyclical nature of feedback. It also demonstrates that communication is complex because it involves interpretation. This model also highlights that we are active communicators and interpreters of the messages we receive.

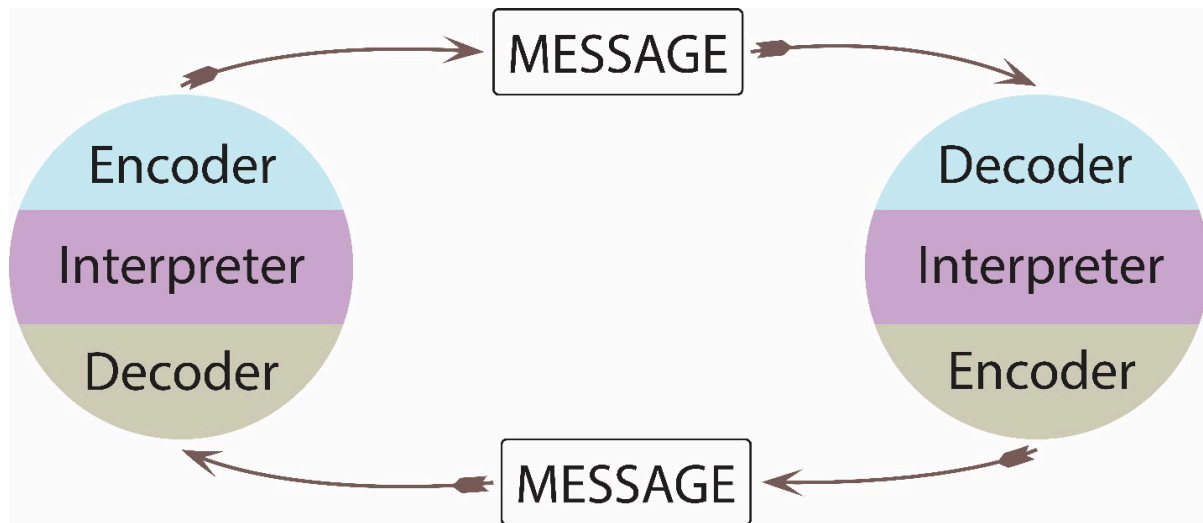


Figure 2.7 Osgood-Schramm Model

Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson Model

Watzlawick et al. argued that communication is continuous.²⁶ The researchers argued that communication happens all the time. Every time a message is sent, a response is returned, and the process continues from Person A to Person B until someone stops. Feedback is provided every time Person A sends a message. This model comprises five axioms.

First, one cannot, not communicate. This means that everything one does has communicative value. Even if people do not talk to each other, it still conveys the idea that both parties do not want to communicate with each other. The second axiom states that every message has a content and a relationship dimension. Content is the informational part of the message or the subject of discussion. The relationship dimension refers to how the two communicators feel about each other. The third axiom pertains to how communicators in the system punctuate their communicative sequences. Watzlawick et al. observed that every communication event has a stimulus, response, and reinforcement. Each communicator can be a stimulus or a response. Fourth, communication can be analog or digital. Digital refers to the meaning of the words. Analogical refers to how the words are said or the nonverbal behavior that accompanies the message. The last axiom states that communication can be either symmetrical or complementary. This means that both communicators have similar power relations, or they do not. Conflict and misunderstandings can arise when communicators have different power relations. For instance, your boss might have the right to fire you from your job if you do not conduct yourself professionally.

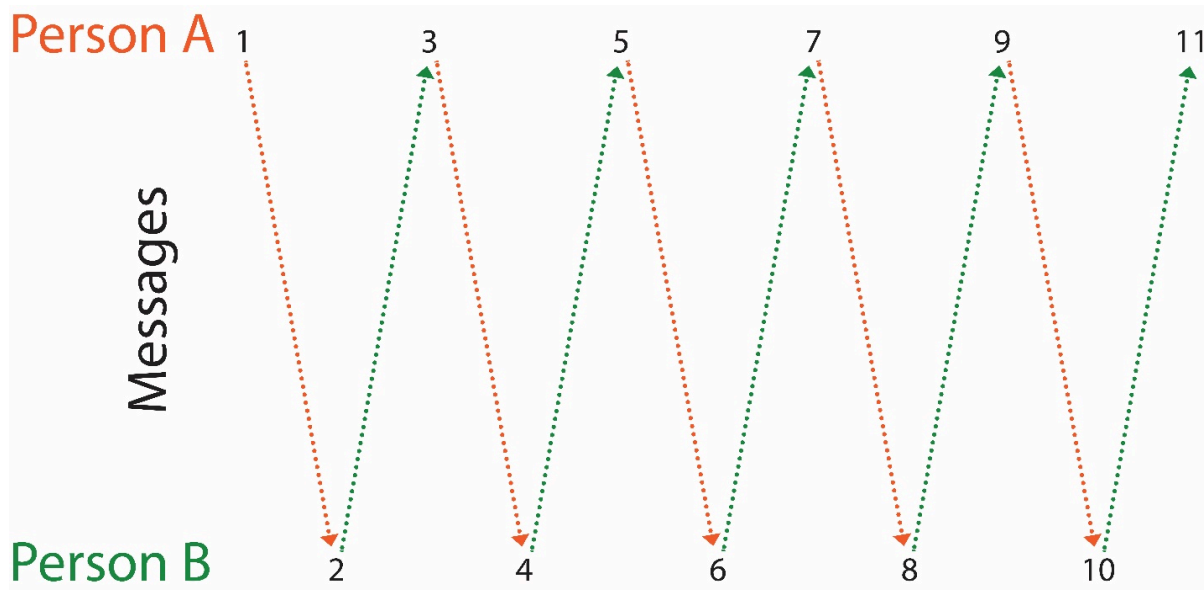


Figure 2.8 Watzlawick-Beavin-Jackson Model

Transaction Models

The transactional models differ from the interactional models in that they show that individuals often act as both the sender and receiver simultaneously. Basically, sending and receiving messages happen simultaneously.

Barnlund's Transactional Model

In 1970, Dean C. Barnlund created the **transactional model** of communication to understand basic interpersonal communication.²⁷ Barnlund argues that one problem with the more linear models of communication is that they resemble mediated messages. The message is created, sent, and received. For example, we write an email, send it, and it is read. Instead, Barnlund argues that during interpersonal interactions, we both send and receive messages simultaneously. Of all the other communication models, this one features a multi-layered feedback system. We can provide oral feedback, but our nonverbal communication (e.g., tone of voice, eye contact, facial expressions, gestures) is equally important in how others interpret the messages we are sending. We use others' nonverbal behavior to interpret their messages. As such, in any interpersonal interaction, a ton of messages are sent and received simultaneously between the two people.

The Importance of Cues

The main components of the model include cues. There are three types of cues: public, private, and behavioral. Public cues refer to any physical or environmental stimuli. Private cues refer to the private objects of orientation, which include a person's senses. Behavioral cues include nonverbal and verbal cues.

The Importance of Context

The transactional model of communication also suggests that three contexts coexist during an interaction:

1. **Social Context:** The rules and norms that govern how people communicate with one another.
2. **Cultural Context:** The cultural and co-cultural identities people have (e.g., ability, age, biological sex assigned at birth, gender identity, ethnicity, nationality, race, sexual orientation, social class, etc.).
3. **Relational Context:** The nature of the bond or emotional attachment between two people (e.g., parent/guardian-child, sibling-sibling, teacher-student, health care worker-client, best friends, acquaintances, etc.).

Through our interpersonal interactions, we create social reality; however, all these different contexts influence this reality.

The Importance of Noise

Another important factor to consider in Barnlund's Transactional Model is noise, which encompasses elements that disrupt or interrupt the flow of communication. Like the three contexts explored above, there are another four contexts that can affect our ability to interact with people effectively:²⁸

1. **Physical Context:** The physical space where interaction is occurring (type of space [office, school, home, doctor's office] and characteristics of space [is the space loud, is the furniture comfortable, etc.]).
2. **Physiological Context:** The body's responses to what's happening in its environment.
 - a. **Internal:** Physiological responses that result from our body's internal processes (e.g., hunger, a headache, physically tired, etc.).
 - b. **External:** Physiological responses that result from external stimuli within the environment (e.g., are you cold, are you hot, the color of the room, are you physically comfortable, etc.).
3. **Psychological Context:** How the human mind responds to what's occurring within its environment (e.g., emotional state, thoughts, perceptions, intentions, mindfulness, etc.).
4. **Semantic Context:** The possible understanding and interpretation of different messages sent (e.g., someone's language, size of vocabulary, effective use of grammar, etc.).

In each of these contexts, it's possible to have things that disturb or interrupt the flow of communication. For example, in the physical context, hard plastic chairs can make you uncomfortable and not want to sit for very long talking to someone. Physiologically, having a headache (internal) or being in a very hot room can make it difficult to concentrate and listen effectively to another person. Psychologically, suppose we have just broken up with our significant other. In that case, we may find it difficult to sit and have a casual conversation with someone while our brains are running a thousand miles a minute. Semantically, if we don't understand a word that someone uses, it can prevent us from accurately interpreting someone's messages. When you think about it, with all the possi-

ble interference of noise that exists within an interpersonal interaction, it's pretty impressive that we ever get anything accomplished.

More often than not, we are completely unaware of how these different contexts create noise and impact our interactions with one another during the moment itself. For example, consider the physical environments of fast-food restaurants versus those of fine dining establishments. In fast-food restaurants, the décor is often bright; the lighting is bright; the seats are made of hard surfaces (usually plastic), and the atmosphere is loud, etc. This noise causes people to eat faster, leading to increased turnover rates. Conversely, fine dining establishments often feature tablecloths, more comfortable chairs, dimmer lighting, and quieter dining environments. The physical space in a fast-food restaurant hurries interaction and increases turnover. The physical space in the fine dining restaurant slows our interactions, causes us to stay longer, and we spend more money. However, most of us don't pay that much attention to how physical space is impacting us while we're having a conversation with another person.

Although we used the external environment here as an example of how noise impacts our interpersonal interactions, we could examine all these contexts and discuss how they affect us in ways we're not consciously aware of. We'll explore many of these contexts throughout the rest of this book.

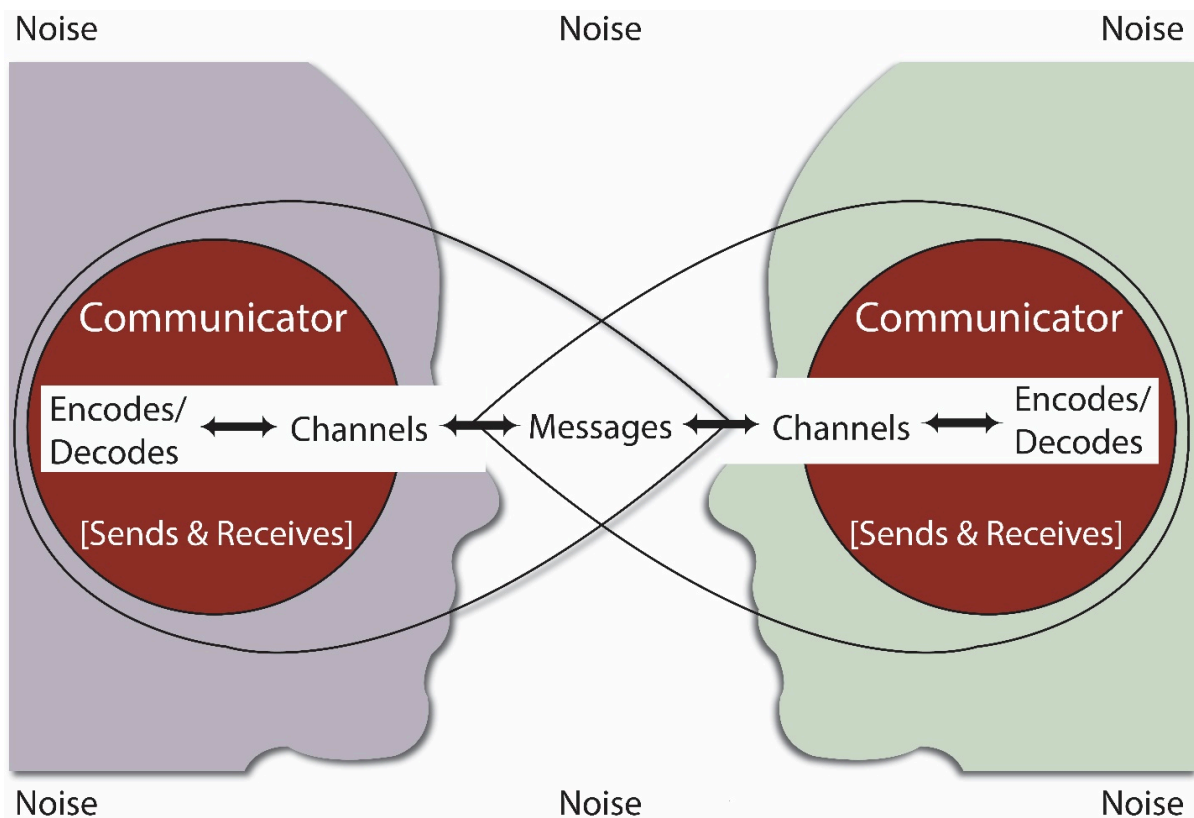


Figure 2.9 Transactional Model of Communication

Transaction Principles

As you can see, these models of communication are all very different. They share similar components, yet they are conveyed in very different ways. Some have features that others do not. Neverthe-

less, there are transactional principles that are essential to understand in the context of interpersonal communication.

Communication is Complex

People might think that communication is easy. However, there are several factors, such as power, language, and relationship differences, that can influence the conversation. Communication isn't easy. Not everyone will have the same interpretation of a message. You will see advertisements that some people will love and others will find offensive. The reason is that people do not receive a message in the same way.

Communication is Continuous

In many of the communication models we learned, communication never stops. Every time a source sends a message, the receiver decodes it, and the process repeats. It is an endless cycle, because even if one person stops talking, they have already sent a message that the communication needs to end. As a receiver, you can keep trying to send messages, or you can stop talking as well, which sends the message to the other person that you also want to stop talking.

Communication is Dynamic

With new technology and changing times, we observe that communication is continually evolving. Before social media, people interacted in very different ways. Some people have suggested that social media has influenced how we talk to each other. The models have evolved as people have also changed their methods of communication. People no longer use the phone to call others; instead, they prefer to text message because they find it easier and less invasive.

Final Note

The advantage of this model is that it shows that there is a shared field of experience between the sender and receiver. The transactional model shows that messages happen simultaneously with noise. However, the model has several disadvantages, including its complexity, which requires the sender and receiver to understand the messages they exchange with each other.

Toward a Model of Mindful Communication

So, what does a model of mindful communication look like? To begin, we believe that mindful communication is closely related to the transactional model of human communication. All facets of transactional communication can also be applied in this context. The main addition to the model of mindful communication is coupling what we already know about the transactional model with what we learned in [Chapter 1](#) about mindfulness. In Figure 2.9, we have combined the transactional model with Shauna Shapiro and Linda Carlson's three parts of mindful practice: attention, intention, and attitude.²⁹

We're not proposing a new model of communication in this text; we're proposing a new way of coupling interpersonal communication with mindfulness. So, how would mindful interpersonal

communication work? According to Levine Tatkin, “Mindful communication is all about being more conscious about the way you interact with the other person daily. It is about being more present when the other person is communicating to you.”³⁰ As such, we argue that mindful communication is learning to harness the power of mindfulness to focus our ability to communicate with other people interpersonally effectively.

Many of us engage in mindless communication every day. We don’t pay attention to the conversation; we don’t think about our intentions during the interaction; and we don’t analyze our attitudes while we talk. Have you ever found yourself doing any of the following during an interpersonal interaction?

- Constantly checking your smartphone.
- Focusing on anything but the other person talking.
- Forming your responses before the other person stops talking.
- Cutting the other person off while they are talking.
- Constantly interrupting the other person while they are talking.
- Getting impatient when the other person doesn’t “get to the point fast enough.”
- Trying to come up with solutions the person never asked for.
- Getting bored.
- Having biases against the other person or their ideas without really listening to them.
- Starting arguments for no reason.
- Finding yourself yelling or screaming at someone else.
- Refusing to “give in” or “find the middle ground” when engaged in conflict.

These are just a few examples of what mindless interpersonal interactions can look like when we don’t consider the attention, intention, and attitude. Mindful interpersonal communication, on the other hand, occurs when we engage in the following communication behaviors:³¹

- Listening to your partner without being distracted.
- Holding a conversation without being too emotional.
- Being non-judgmental when you talk, argue, or even fight with your partner.
- Accepting your partner’s perspective even if it is different from yours.
- Validating yourself and your partner.

The authors of this text firmly believe that engaging in mindful, interpersonal communication is crucial in our day-to-day lives. All of us are bombarded with messages, and it’s effortless to treat all messages as if they were equal and must be attended to within a moment. Let’s look at that first mindless behavior we talked about earlier, checking your cellphone while you’re talking to people. In [Chapter 1](#), we explained that our minds wander 47% of the time.³² Our monkey brains are constantly jumping from idea to idea before we add in technology. If you’re continually checking your cellphone while you’re talking to someone, you’re allowing your brain to roam even more than it already does.

Effective interpersonal communication is hard. The goal of a mindful approach to interpersonal communication is to train ourselves to be in the moment with someone listening and talking. We’ll discuss listening and speaking further later in this text. For now, we’re going to wrap up this chapter by looking at some specific skills to enhance your interpersonal communication.

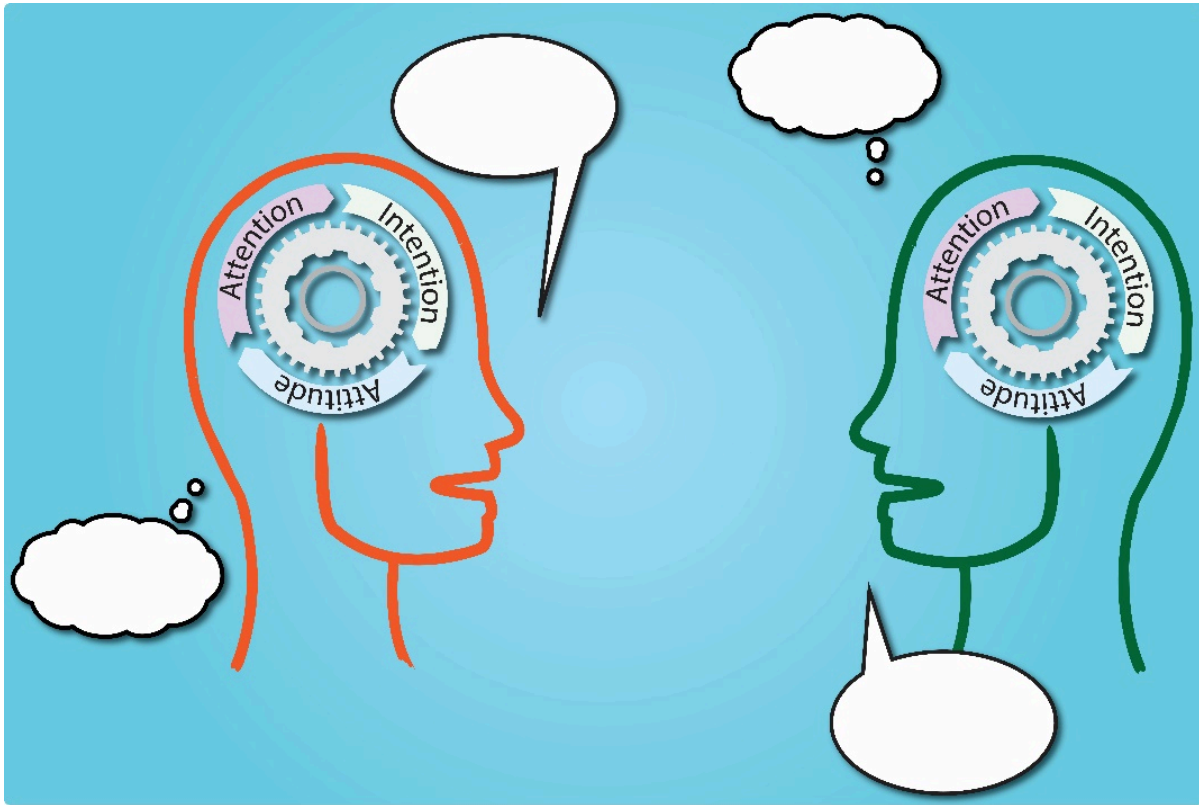


Figure 2.10 Model of Mindful Communication

Research Spotlight



In 2025, Peng-Yu Zeng and colleagues conducted a study examining the impact of mindfulness on communication quality between younger and older adults, using the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) to assess intrapersonal mindfulness in conjunction with a separate measure of interpersonal mindfulness.³³ The FFMQ evaluates five distinct components of mindfulness: nonreactivity to inner experience, observing thoughts and feelings, acting with awareness, describing with words, and non-judging of inner

thoughts.

The researchers recruited 44 younger adults (average age 21.95) and 44 older adults (average age 62.61) from Taiwan, using a cutoff score of 135 on the FFMQ to classify participants as having high or low mindfulness. Participants were then paired into intergenerational communication dyads and engaged in three communication scenarios: sharing positive and negative experiences, completing collaborative tangram puzzle tasks, and discussing controversial topics to reach consensus.

The study found that individuals scoring higher on the FFMQ demonstrated significantly better communication outcomes across multiple dimensions. Higher FFMQ scores were associated with increased positive emotions, reduced stress, enhanced communication satisfaction, greater empathy, closer psychological distance with communication partners, and higher consensus on controversial topics. These findings align with previous research suggesting that the five facet model captures important dimensions of mindful awareness, which in turn translate into improved interpersonal functioning.

Key Takeaways

- Models help us simplify and understand complex interpersonal interactions by highlighting the most important components and connections. They can be used to explain, predict, or simulate real-world communication processes.
- Action models, such as Shannon-Weaver's and Berlo's SMCR model, depict communication as a one-way transmission from sender to receiver. These models highlight the linear process of encoding, transmitting, and decoding messages with minimal focus on feedback.
- Interactional models represent communication as a two-way process in which both the sender and receiver share responsibility. These models emphasize feedback and interpretation, as seen in the Osgood-Schramm and Watzlawick-Beavin-Jackson models.
- Transactional models, such as Barnlund's, depict communication as a dynamic, simultaneous exchange where people send and receive messages simultaneously. They incorporate nonverbal cues, feedback loops, and multiple layers of context.
- Mindful interpersonal communication builds on the transactional model by adding awareness of one's attention, intention, and attitude. It encourages being fully present, listening without judgment, and recognizing how external and internal distractions influence communication.

Exercises

1. Choose one action model, one interactional model, and Barnlund's transactional model. Use each model to explain one communication scenario that you create. What are the differences in the explanations of each model?

2. Choose the communication model with which you most agree. Why is it better than the other models?

Interpersonal Communication Skills

Learning Objectives

1. Define listening and describe the characteristics of mindful listening.
2. Identify key people skills that contribute to successful interpersonal communication.
3. Describe the concept of emotional intelligence (EQ) and its role in interpersonal interactions.
4. Recognize the importance of selecting appropriate communication skills tailored to the context.
5. Identify core principles that guide ethical interpersonal communication.

In this chapter, we have explored various aspects of interpersonal communication. Overall, certain skills can enhance your ability to communicate effectively with others. We will discuss them in more detail below.

Listening Skills

The most important part of communication is not the actual talking, but the listening part. If you are not a good listener, then you will not be a good communicator. One must engage in mindful listening. Mindful listening is when you give careful and thoughtful attention to the messages that you receive. People will often listen mindfully to important messages or to people who matter most. Think about how happy you get when you are talking to someone you really love, or maybe how you pay more attention to what a professor says if they tell you it will be on the exam. In each of these scenarios, you are giving the speaker your undivided attention. Most of our listening isn't mindful, but there will be times when it will be important to listen to what others are telling us so that we can fulfill our personal and/or professional goals. We'll discuss listening in more detail in [Chapter 7](#).

In case you are interested in immediate tips for listening, the Harvard Business review provides a list of five listening pitfalls to avoid.³⁴

- Haste – be patient when listening
- Invisibility – show your presence through eye contact and head nods
- Defensiveness – be open minded and willing to accept responsibility

- Exhaustion – fatigue impacts listening, reschedule if need be
- Inaction – summarize main points and next steps, follow-up

People Skills

People skills are a set of characteristics that will help you interact well with others.³⁵ These skills are most important in group situations and where cooperation is needed. These skills can also relate to how you handle social situations. They can make a positive impact on career advancement but also in relationship development.³⁶ One of the most essential people skills to have is the ability to understand people. Being able to feel empathy or sympathy toward another person's situation can go a long way. By putting yourself in other people's shoes and understanding their hardships or differences, you can gain a more nuanced perspective. It can help you build a stronger and better interpersonal relationship.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EQ) is the ability to recognize your own emotions and the emotions of others.³⁷ Emotionally intelligent people can label their feelings appropriately and use this information to guide their behavior. EQ is highly associated with the ability to empathize with others. Furthermore, EQ can help people connect interpersonally. Research has demonstrated that people with higher levels of EQ are more likely to succeed in the workplace and have better mental health. They are often better leaders and effective managers of conflict. We'll discuss the idea of EQ in more detail in [Chapter 3](#).

Appropriate Skill Selection

The best interpersonal communicators are the ones who can use the appropriate skills in certain contexts. For instance, if it is a somber event, then they might not laugh. Or, if it is a joyful occasion, they might not cry hysterically unless it is tears of joy. The best politicians can sense their audience and determine which skills are most appropriate for each occasion. We know that humor can be beneficial in certain situations. However, humor can also be inappropriate for certain people. It is essential to know what skills are appropriate to use and when it is necessary to use them.

Communicating Ethically

The last interpersonal skill involves communication **ethics**. We have seen several people in the business world who have gotten in trouble for not communicating ethically. It is important to be mindful of what you say to others. You do not want people to think you are deceptive or that you are lying to them. Trust is a hard thing to build. Yet, trust can be taken away from you quickly. It is essential that every time you communicate, you should consider the ethics behind your words. As we will see throughout this book, words matter! So, what does it mean to communicate ethi-

cally interpersonally? Thankfully, the National Communication Association has created a general credo for ethical communication.³⁸ The subheadings below represent the nine statements created by the National Communication Association to help guide conversations related to communication ethics.

We advocate truthfulness, accuracy, honesty, and reason as essential to the integrity of communication.

The first statement in the credo for ethical communication is one that has taken on a greater significance in recent years: being truthful. We live in a world where the blurring of fact and fiction, real life and fantasy, truth and lies, real news and fake news, etc. has become increasingly blurry. The NCA credo argues that ethical communication should always strive for truth and integrity. As such, it's important to consider our interpersonal communication and ensure that we are not spreading lies.

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.

You don't have to agree with everyone. In fact, it's perfectly appropriate to disagree with people and do so in a civilized manner. So much of our interpersonal communication in the 21st Century seems to have become about shouting, "I'm right, you're wrong." As such, it's important to remember that it's possible for many different vantage points to have equal value. From an ethical perspective, it's very important to listen to others and not immediately start thinking about our comebacks or counter-arguments. When we're only focused on our comebacks and counter-arguments, then we're not listening effectively. Now, we are not arguing that people should have the right to their own set of facts. In the previous statement, we believe in facts and think the idea of "alternative facts" is horrific. However, people's experiences in life often lead them to different perspectives that can be equally valid.

We strive to understand and respect other communicators before evaluating and responding to their messages.

In addition to what was discussed in the previous statement, it's essential to approach our interpersonal interactions from a position of understanding and respect. Part of the mindfulness approach to interpersonal communication that we've advocated for in this book involves understanding and respect. Too many people in our world today immediately shut down others with whom they disagree without giving them a chance to be heard. We know that it's tough to listen to messages with which you strongly disagree, but we can still disagree and, at the end of the day, respect each other.

We promote access to communication resources and

opportunities as necessary to fulfill human potential and contribute to the well-being of individuals, families, communities, and society.

As communication scholars, we believe that everyone can improve their communication skills. One reason we've written this book is because we believe that all students should have access to an interpersonal communication textbook that is free. Furthermore, we believe that everyone should have the opportunity to develop their interpersonal communication, listening, presentation, and social skills. Ultimately, developing communication skills helps people in their interpersonal relationships and makes them better individuals overall. According to Morreale et al.:

Communication can help couples connect on a deeper level and feel more satisfied with their relationships. Additionally, competent communication strengthens bonds among family members and helps them cope with conflict and stressful situations. Communication gives family members the tools they need to express their feelings and address their concerns in a constructive way, which ultimately helps when conflicts and stressful situations arise... Better interpersonal communication can improve the social health of a community by strengthening relationships among various community members.³⁹

We promote communication climates of caring and mutual understanding that respect the unique needs and characteristics of individual communicators.

As communicators, we need to take a two-pronged approach to our interpersonal interactions. First, we need to care about the needs of others. We need to understand that our communication can either build people up or tear them down. We should strive to build people up through our interactions with them. This doesn't mean that there aren't times when you have to tell people that they're wrong, but there are ways of doing this that correct people without attacking their self-esteem.

Second, we need to strive for mutual understanding. As we've learned in this chapter, many factors can make communication with one another very difficult. However, we should strive to ensure that our messages are interpreted correctly by others and that we're interpreting others' messages correctly as well. We should avoid jumping to conclusions and assuming that someone's messages are always ill-intended.

We condemn communication that degrades individuals and humanity through distortion, intimidation, coercion, and violence, and through the expression of intolerance and hatred.

We believe that any communication that degrades another person should be seen as reprehensible by everyone. For many of us, it's easy for us to clearly label obvious hate messages as disgusting (e.g., anti-immigrant signs, burning crosses, racist graffiti, etc.). However, many people use biased lan-

guage without realizing it. We'll discuss the issue of biased language and how to avoid it in more detail in [Chapter 4](#).

We are committed to the courageous expression of personal convictions in pursuit of fairness and justice.

We live in a world where injustices are still very prevalent. From anti-immigrant rhetoric to laws preventing medical treatment for transgender people, we believe that it's important for people to pursue fairness and justice in our world today. As such, we all need to remember this when interacting with others. Whether it's remembering to call someone by their preferred pronouns or supporting individuals seeking equal rights and protection under the law, we should help those individuals.

We advocate sharing information, opinions, and feelings when facing significant choices while also respecting privacy and confidentiality.

We live in a world where we face innumerable choices about the future. In our interpersonal interactions, people need to share information, opinions, and feelings without having them dismissed immediately. Again, not that we believe that people should have the right to their own facts, but people should be allowed to express their own opinions and feelings.

Besides sharing information, opinions, and feelings, it's essential to respect people's privacy and confidentiality. Not everything we hear from another person is broadcast openly to the world. It's important to remember not to tell other people's business.

We accept responsibility for the short- and long-term consequences for our own communication and expect the same of others.

Lastly, the National Communication Association's Credo for Ethical Communication advocates that people take responsibility for the consequences of their communication. If you say something that hurts someone else's feelings, it's essential to acknowledge it and apologize. If we accidentally spread false information, it's essential to correct the facts as soon as we learn the truth.

Rodrick Hart and Don Burks coined the term "rhetorical sensitivity" to help explain awareness of our own communicative behaviors. According to Hart and Burks,

The rhetorically sensitive person (a) tries to accept role-taking as part of the human condition, (b) attempts to avoid stylized verbal behavior, (c) is characteristically willing to undergo the strain of adaptation, (d) seeks to distinguish between all information and that information acceptable for communication, and (e) tries to understand that an idea can be rendered in multi-form ways.⁴⁰

In the ethics of our communicative choices, it's essential to be rhetorically sensitive to fully understand the short- and long-term consequences that arise from our communicative behaviors.

Key Takeaways

- Mindful listening is giving careful and thoughtful attention to others, especially during important conversations. It is a core part of communication and essential for building meaningful interpersonal connections.
- People skills encompass empathy, understanding, and the ability to interact cooperatively with others. These skills are particularly valuable in both personal and professional settings.
- Emotional intelligence (EQ) refers to recognizing and managing one's own emotions, as well as understanding the emotions of others. Higher EQ fosters stronger relationships, enhances conflict management, and contributes to professional success.
- Appropriate skill selection involves choosing the right interpersonal behavior for a given situation. Good communicators adjust their responses to match the emotional tone and expectations of their environment.
- Ethical communication involves honesty, respect, tolerance, and accountability. Following ethical principles—such as those promoted by the National Communication Association—helps build trust and fosters civil, inclusive dialogue.

Exercises

1. Recall a situation in which you experienced conflict. Now that you know some approaches to effective interpersonal communication, evaluate the experience you recalled and describe what you could have done differently.
2. Recall a situation in which your confidence was broken. You asked someone to keep a secret and they didn't. How did this make you feel? In what situations is it acceptable to violate the confidentiality of another person?
3. We all excel in something related to communication. What are your best communication skills? In what areas would you like to improve?

Key Terms

action model

attending

channel

emotional intelligence

environment	organizing
ethics	perception
feedback	receiver
interaction model	self-concept
interpreting	source
Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs	transactional model
model	uncertainty reduction theory
noise	

Chapter Wrap-Up

In this chapter, we have learned about various things that can impact interpersonal communication. We learned that Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs can impact how messages are received. We learned about the perception process and its three stages: attending, interpreting, and organizing. We also discussed the various communication models to understand how the process of communication looks in interpersonal situations. Lastly, we briefly overviewed interpersonal communication skills.

Chapter Exercises

Real-World Case Study

Addie and Patrick had been dating for 13 months. They discussed getting married and whether they might have children. One day, it became apparent that Patrick had not been paying his credit card bill as he had claimed. Addie approached him to ask about the situation. He became very angry with her and a huge fight ensued. They both called each other names and spoke to each other in ways they never expected. After the fight, Addie and Patrick apologized to each other and promised never to speak to one another that way again. Which principle of communication might Addie and Patrick consider as they move forward in their relationship?

End-of-Chapter Assessment

- Paul tells Jenna that her last name must be Campbell, because she is "Mmmm...good." Paul is trying to _____ the message to Jenna.
 - encode
 - decode

- c. provide feedback
 - d. provide noise
 - e. none of these
2. Larry is very hungry because he skipped breakfast. He can't pay attention to other people because he is focused on his hunger. This type of noise is:
- a. physical
 - b. semantic
 - c. psychological
 - d. physiological
 - e. none of these
3. Which type of schema focuses on the social position?
- a. physical
 - b. role
 - c. interaction
 - d. behavior
 - e. psychological
4. Kara pays attention to advertisements about cars, because she is looking to buy a new car. The reason she is selecting these messages over others is because the ads:
- a. are different
 - b. are intense
 - c. appeal to her emotional states
 - d. appeal to her motives
 - e. are repetitious
5. Mark just met a new student named Jenny. He is trying to learn more about her through her social media sites. According to uncertainty reduction theory, which strategy is Mark using to reduce uncertainty?
- a. passive
 - b. active
 - c. interactive
 - d. non-active
 - e. dismissive

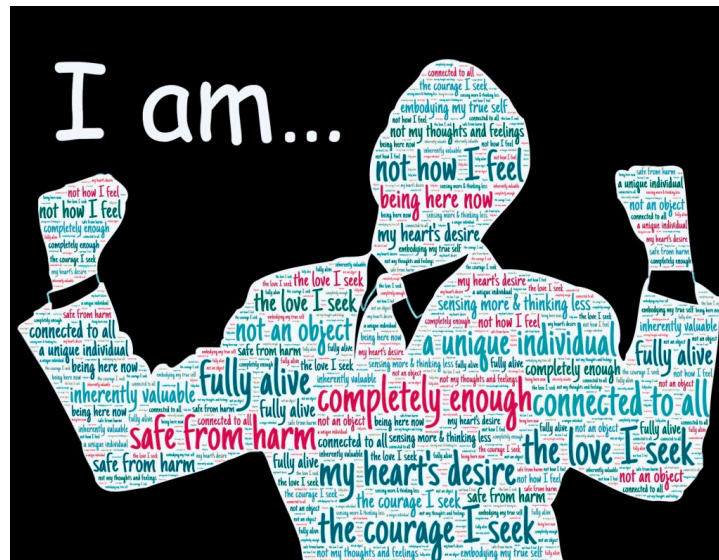
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Chapter 3: Intrapersonal Communication



“Identity, Self, Authentic” by [John Hain](#) from [Pixabay](#)

Who are you? Have you ever sat around thinking about how you fit into the larger universe? Manfred Kuhn devised a straightforward exercise to address the heart of this question.¹ Take out a piece of paper and number 1 to 20 (or use the worksheet in the workbook). For each number, answer the question “Who Am I?” using a complete sentence. Results from this activity reveal five distinct categories about an individual: the social group to which an individual belongs, ideological beliefs, personal interests, personal ambitions, and self-evaluations. If you completed the Twenty-Item Test, take a moment to identify your list using this scheme. All of these five categories are happening at what is called the intrapersonal level. **Intrapersonal** refers to something that exists or occurs within an individual’s self or mind. This chapter focuses on understanding intrapersonal processes and their relationship to communication.

Larry Barker and Gordon Wiseman are credited with one of the earliest definitions of the term “intrapersonal communication” in the field of communication. Barker and Wiseman defined intrapersonal communication as “the creating, functioning, and evaluating of symbolic processes which operate primarily within oneself.”² The researchers go on to explain that intrapersonal communication exists on a continuum from thinking and reflecting (more internal) to talking aloud or writing a note to oneself (more external).

More recently, Samuel Riccillo defined intrapersonal communication as a “process involving the activity of the individual biological organism’s capacity to coordinate and organize complex actions

of an intentional nature... For the human organism, such complex interactions are anchored in the signaling processes known as symbolic language.”³ Both the Barker and Wiseman and the Riccillo definitions represent two ends of the spectrum regarding the idea of intrapersonal communication. For our purposes in this book, we define intrapersonal communication as something of a hybrid between these two definitions. **Intrapersonal communication** refers to communication phenomena that exist within or occur because of an individual’s self or mind. Under this definition, we can examine Barker and Wiseman’s notions of both ends of their intrapersonal communication continuum while also realizing that Riccillo’s notions of biology (e.g., personality and communication traits) are equally important.

Who Are You?

Learning Objectives

1. Identify and define the concept of perception in interpersonal communication.
2. Describe the three stages of the perception process: attending, organizing, and interpreting.
3. Explain how personal factors (e.g., experience, emotions) influence perception.
4. Recognize how perception impacts interpersonal communication and potential misunderstandings.
5. Apply understanding of perception to interpret real-world communication scenarios.

In the first part of this chapter, we mentioned Manford Kuhn’s “Who Am I?” exercise for understanding ourselves. Many of the items typically listed by individuals completing this exercise can be categorized under the areas of self-concept and self-esteem. In this section, we’re going to examine both concepts.

Self-Concept

According to Roy F. Baumeister (1999), **self-concept** implies “the individual’s belief about himself or herself, including the person’s attributes and who and what the self is.”⁴ An attribute is a characteristic, feature, or quality or inherent part of a person, group, or thing. In 1968, social psychologist Norman Anderson compiled a list of 555 personal attributes.⁵ He had research participants rate the 555 attributes from most desirable to least desirable. The top ten most desirable characteristics were:

1. Sincere
2. Honest

3. Understanding
4. Loyal
5. Truthful
6. Trustworthy
7. Intelligent
8. Dependable
9. Open-Minded
10. Thoughtful

Conversely, the top ten least desirable attributes were:

1. Liar
2. Phony
3. Mean
4. Cruel
5. Dishonest
6. Untruthful
7. Obnoxious
8. Malicious
9. Dishonorable
10. Deceitful

When reviewing this list, do you agree with the rankings from 1968? In a more recent study, conducted by Jesse Chandler using an expanded list of 1,042 attributes,⁶ the following pattern emerged for the top 10 most positively viewed attributes:

1. Honest
2. Likable
3. Compassionate
4. Respectful
5. Kindly
6. Sincere
7. Trustworthy
8. Ethical
9. Good-Natured
10. Honorable

And here is the updated list for the top 10 most negatively viewed attributes:

1. Pedophile
2. Homicidal
3. Evil-Doer
4. Abusive
5. Evil-Minded
6. Nazi
7. Mugger
8. Asswipe

9. Untrustworthy
10. Hitlerish

Some changes in both lists represent changing times and the addition of the new terms by Chandler. For example, the terms “sincere,” “honest,” and “trustworthy” were essential attributes for both the 1968 and 2018 studies. Conversely, none of the negative attributes remained the same from 1968 to 2018. The negative attributes, mostly, represent more modern sensibilities about personal attributes.

The Three Selves

Carl Rogers, a distinguished psychologist in the humanistic approach to psychology, believed that an individual’s self-concept is made of three distinct things: self-image, self-worth, and ideal-self.⁷

Self-Image

An individual’s **self-image** is a view that they have of themselves. If we go back and look at the attributes that we’ve listed in this section, think about these as laundry lists of possibilities that impact your view of yourself. For example, you may view yourself as ethical, trustworthy, honest, and loyal, but you may also realize that sometimes you are also obnoxious and mean. For a positive self-image, we will have more positive attributes than negative ones. However, it’s also possible that one negative attribute may overshadow the positive attributes, which is why we also need to be aware of our perceptions of our self-worth.

Self-Worth

Self-worth is the value that you place on yourself. Self-worth is the degree to which you see yourself as a good person who deserves to be valued and respected. Unfortunately, many people judge their self-worth based on arbitrary measuring sticks like physical appearance, net worth, social circle/clique, career, grades, achievements, age, relationship status, likes on Facebook, social media followers, etc.... Interested in seeing how you view your self-worth? Take a minute to complete the [Contingencies of Self-Worth Scale](#).⁸ According to Courtney Ackerman, there are four things you can do to help improve your self-worth:⁹

1. You no longer need to please other people.
2. No matter what people do or say, and regardless of what happens outside of you, you alone control how you feel about yourself.
3. You have the power to respond to events and circumstances based on your internal sources, resources, and resourcefulness, which are a reflection of your true value.
4. Your value comes from inside, from an internal measure that you’ve set for yourself.

Ideal-Self

The final characteristic of Rogers’ three parts to self-concept is the ideal-self.¹⁰ The **ideal-self** is the version of yourself that you would like to be, which is created through our life experiences, cultural demands, and expectations of others. The real-self, on the other hand, is the person you are.

The ideal-self is perfect, flawless, and, ultimately, completely unrealistic. When an individual's real-self and ideal-self are not remotely similar, someone needs to think through if that idealized version of one's self is attainable. It's also important to know that our ideal-self is continuously evolving. How many of us wanted to be firefighters, police officers, or astronauts as kids? Some of you may still want to be one of these, but most of us have had our ideal-self evolve.

Three Self's Working Together

Now that we've looked at the three parts of Carl Rogers' theory of self-concept, let's discuss how they all work together to create one's self-concept. Rogers' theory of self-concept also examines a concept we discussed in [Chapter 2](#), specifically Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Specifically, the idea of self-actualization. In Rogers' view, self-actualization cannot happen when an individual's self-image, self-worth, and ideal-self have no overlap.

As you can see in Figure 3.1, on the left side, you have the three parts of self-concept as very distinct in this individual, which is why it's called incongruent, or the three are not compatible with each other. In this case, someone's self-image and ideal-self may have nothing in common, and this person views themselves as having no self-worth. When someone has this type of incongruence, they are likely to exhibit other psychological problems. On the other hand, when someone's self-image, ideal-self, and self-worth overlap, that person is congruent because the three parts of self-concept overlap and are compatible with each other. The more this overlap grows, the greater the likelihood someone will be able to self-actualize. Rogers believed that self-actualization was an important part of self-concept because until a person self-actualizes, they will be out of balance with how they relate to the world and with others.

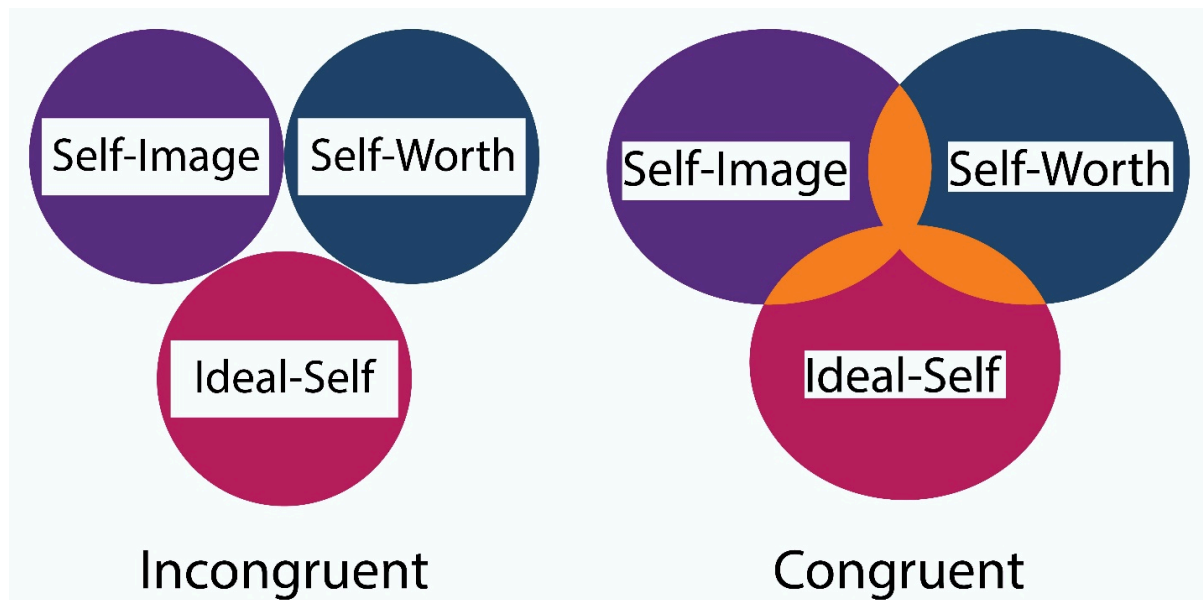


Figure 3.1 Carl Rogers' Self-Concept

The “Looking-Glass” Self

In 1902, Charles Horton Cooley wrote *Human Nature and the Social Order*. In this book, Cooley introduced a concept called the looking-glass self: “Each to each a looking-glass / Reflects the other that doth pass”¹¹ Although the term “looking-glass” isn’t used very often in today’s modern tongue, it means a mirror. Cooley argues that when we look in a mirror, we also think about how others view us and the judgments they make about us. Cooley ultimately posed three postulates:

1. Actors learn about themselves in every situation by exercising their imagination to reflect on their social performance.
2. Actors next imagine what those others must think of them. Actors imagine others’ evaluations of their performance.
3. The actor experiences an affective reaction to the imagined evaluation of the other.¹²

In Figure 3.2, we see an illustration of this basic idea. You have a figure standing before four glass panes. In the left-most mirror, the figure has devil horns; in the second, a pasted-on fake smile; in the third, a tie; and the last one, a halo. Maybe the figure’s ex sees the devil, his friends and family think the figure is always happy, and the figure’s coworkers see a professional. Last, maybe the figure’s parents/guardians see their little angel. Along with each of these ideas, there are inherent judgments. And, not all of these judgments are necessarily accurate, but we still come to understand and know ourselves based on our perceptions of these judgments.

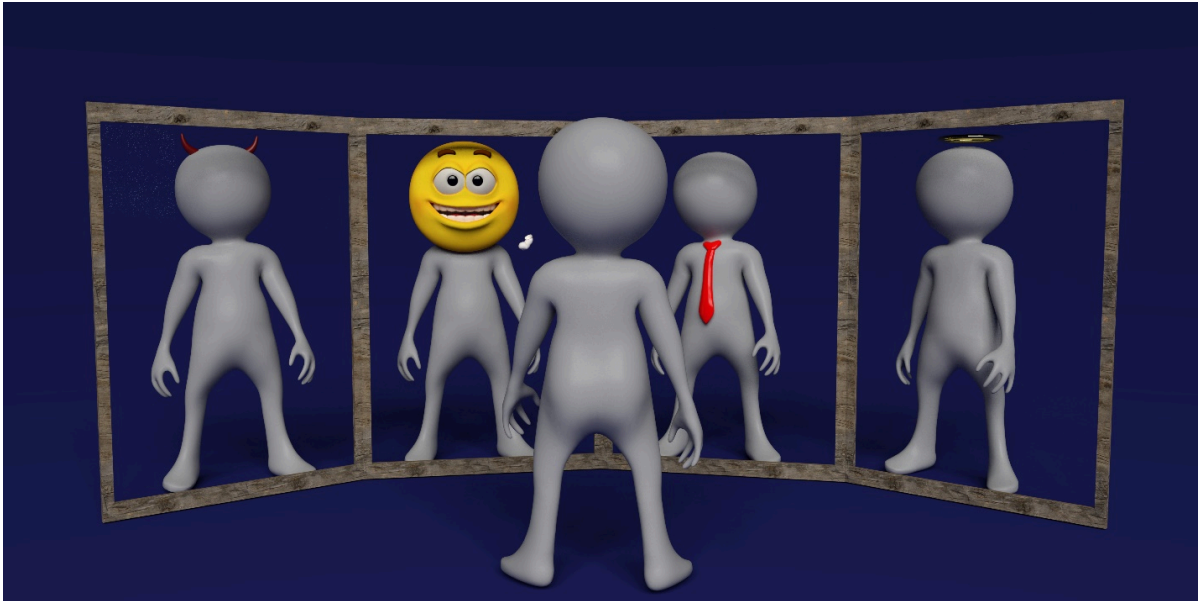


Figure 3.2 Looking-Glass Self

Ultimately, our self-image is shaped through our interactions with others, but only through the mediation of our minds. Because we perceive that others are judging us, we also shape our façade to conform to that perception. For example, if you work in the customer service industry, you may often feel that you are expected to smile. Since you want to be viewed positively, you plaster on a fake smile all the time, no matter what is going on in your personal life. Others may view you as a happy-go-lucky person because you’re always in a good mood.

Thankfully, we don't do this all the time, or we would drive ourselves crazy. Instead, there are certain people in our lives whose judgments we worry about more than others. Imagine you are working in a new job. You respect your new boss, and you want to gain their respect in return. Currently, you believe your boss doesn't think you're a good fit for the organization because you are not serious enough about your job. If you perceive your boss will like you more if you are a more serious worker, then you will alter your behavior to be more in line with what your boss sees as "serious." In this situation, your boss didn't come out and say that you were not a serious worker, but we perceived the boss' perception of us and her/his/their judgment of that perception of us and altered our behavior to be seen in a better light.

Self-Esteem

One of the most commonly discussed concepts in intrapersonal communication is an individual's self-esteem. There are numerous books in both academic and non-academic circles that address this idea.

Defining Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is an individual's subjective evaluation of their abilities and limitations. Let's break down this definition into sizable chunks.

Subjective Evaluation

The definition states that someone's self-esteem is an "individual's subjective evaluation." The word "subjective" emphasizes that self-esteem is based on an individual's emotions and opinions, rather than on facts. For example, many people suffer from the impostor syndrome, where they doubt their accomplishments, knowledge, and skills, living in fear of being exposed as a fraud. These individuals have a constant fear that people will discover they are "not who they say they are." Research in this area suggests that these fears of "being found out" are not grounded in any factual or evidentiary basis. Instead, these individuals' emotions and opinions of themselves are fueled by incongruent self-concepts. Types of people who suffer from impostor syndrome include physicians, CEOs, academics, celebrities, artists, and pretty much any other category. Again, it's important to remember that these perceptions are subjective and not based on any objective sense of reality. Imagine a physician who has gone through four years of college, four years of medical school, three years of residency, and another four years of specialization training, only to worry that someone will find out that they aren't that smart after all. There's no objective basis for this perception; it's completely subjective and contradicts the facts.

Besides the word "subjective," we also use the word "evaluation" in the definition of self-esteem. By evaluation, we mean a determination or judgment about the quality, importance, or value of something. We evaluate a ton of different things daily:

1. We evaluate how we interact with others.
2. We evaluate the work we complete.
3. We also evaluate ourselves and our specific abilities and limitations.

Our lives are filled with constant evaluations.

Abilities

When we discuss our abilities, we are referring to the acquired or natural capacity for specific talents, skills, or proficiencies that facilitate achievement or accomplishment. First, someone's abilities can be inherent (natural) or they can be learned (acquired). For example, if someone is 6'6", has excellent reflexes, and has a good sense of space, they may find that they have a natural ability to play basketball that someone who is 4'6", has poor reflex speed, and has no sense of space simply does not have. That's not to say that both people cannot play basketball, but they will both have different ability levels. They can both play basketball because they can learn skills necessary to play basketball: shooting the ball, dribbling, rules of the game, etc. In a case like basketball, professional-level players need to have a combination of both natural and acquired abilities.

We break abilities into two different categories: talent or skills to help distinguish what we are discussing. First, talent is usually more of an inherent or natural capacity. For example, someone may appear to be the ideal basketball player physically, but they may have zero talent for the game. Sometimes we refer to talent as the "it factor" because it's challenging to pinpoint why some individuals possess it and others don't. Second, skills refer to an individual's use of knowledge or physical being to accomplish a specific task. We often think of skills in terms of the things we learn to do. For example, most people can learn to swim or ride a bike. Learning this may take some time, but we can develop the skills necessary to stay afloat in the water or to achieve balance and pedal a bike.

The last part of the definition of abilities is the importance of achievement and accomplishment. Just because someone has learned the skills to do something does not mean that they can accomplish the task. Think back to when you first learned to ride a bicycle (or another task). Most of us tried and failed several times before we pedaled on our own without falling over. The first time you got on the bicycle and fell over, you didn't have the *ability* to ride a bike. You may have had a general understanding of how it worked, but there's often a massive chasm between knowing how something is done and then actually achieving or accomplishing it. As such, when we discuss abilities, we emphasize the importance of successful completion.

Limitations

Besides one's abilities, it's always important to recognize that we all have limitations. In the words of my podiatrist, I will never be a runner because of the shape of my arch. Whether I like it or not, my foot's physical structure will not allow me to be an effective runner. Thankfully, this was never something I wanted to be. I didn't sit up all night as a child dreaming of running a marathon one day. Here, I have a natural limitation, but it doesn't negatively affect me because I didn't evaluate running positively for myself. Growing up, I took years of piano lessons, but to be honest, I was never very good at it. I have short, stubby fingers, so reaching notes on a piano that are far away is just hard for me. To this day, I wish I were a talented piano player. I am disappointed that I couldn't have been a better piano player. Now, does this limitation cripple me? No.

We all have limitations in what we can and cannot do. When it comes to your self-esteem, it's about how you evaluate those limitations. Do you realize your limitations, and they don't bother you? Or do your limitations prevent you from being happy with yourself? In understanding limi-

tations, it's essential to recognize the limitations that we can change and those that we cannot. One problem that many people face when it comes to limitations is that they struggle to differentiate between the various limitations. If I had wanted to be a runner growing up and then suddenly found out that my dream wasn't possible because of my feet, then I could go through the rest of my life disappointed and depressed that I'm not a runner. Even worse, I could try to force myself into being a runner and cause long-term damage to my body.

Self-Esteem and Communication

By this point, you may be wondering about the importance of self-esteem in interpersonal communication. Self-esteem and communication have a reciprocal relationship (as depicted in Figure 3.3). Our communication with others affects our self-esteem, and our self-esteem, in turn, impacts our communication with others. As such, our self-esteem and communication are constantly transforming one another.

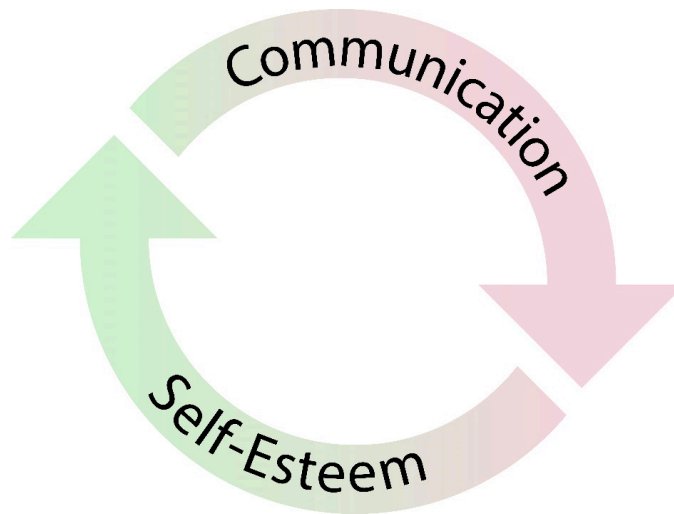


Figure 3.3 Self-Esteem and Communication

As such, interpersonal communication and self-esteem cannot be separated. Now, interpersonal communication is not the only factor that impacts self-esteem, but interpersonal interactions are one of the most important tools we have in developing ourselves.

Mindfulness Activity



One of the beautiful aspects of mindfulness is that it has a positive impact on someone's self-esteem.¹³ people who are higher in mindfulness may report higher self-esteem because of the central tenet of non-judgment. Individuals with low self-esteem frequently report highly negative views of themselves and their life experiences. These negative judgments can wear someone down.

Christopher Pepping, Analise O'Donovan, and Penelope J. Davis believe that mindfulness practice can help improve one's self-esteem for four reasons:¹⁴

- Labeling internal experiences with words, which might prevent people from getting consumed by self-critical thoughts and emotions;
- Bringing a non-judgmental attitude toward thoughts and emotions, which could help individuals have a neutral, accepting attitude toward the self;
- Sustaining attention on the present moment, which could help people avoid becoming caught up in self-critical thoughts that relate to events from the past or future;
- Letting thoughts and emotions enter and leave awareness without reacting to them.¹⁵

For this exercise, think about a recent situation where you engaged in self-critical thoughts.

1. What types of phrases ran through your head? Would you have said these to a friend? If not, why do you say them to yourself?
2. What does the negative voice in your head sound like? Is this voice someone you want to listen to? Why?
3. Did you try temporarily distracting yourself to see if the critical thoughts would go away (e.g., mindfulness meditation, coloring, exercise, etc.)? If yes, how did that help? If not, why?
4. Did you examine the evidence? What proof did you have that the self-critical thought was true?
5. Was this a case of a desire to improve yourself or a case of non-compassion toward yourself?

Self-Compassion

Some researchers have argued that self-esteem as the primary measure of someone's psychological health may not be wise because it stems from comparisons with others and judgments. As such, Kristy Neff has argued for the use of the term self-compassion.¹⁶

Self-Compassion stems out of the larger discussion of compassion. **Compassion** then is about the sympathetic consciousness for someone who is suffering or unfortunate. **Self-compassion** “involves being touched by and open to one’s own suffering, not avoiding or disconnecting from it, generating the desire to alleviate one’s suffering and to heal oneself with kindness. Self-compassion also involves offering non-judgmental understanding to one’s pain, inadequacies and failures, so that one’s experience is seen as part of the larger human experience.”¹⁷ Neff argues that self-compassion can be broken down into three distinct categories: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness (Figure 3.4).



Figure 3.4 Three Factors of Self-Compassion

Self-compassion isn’t just an empty concept that hasn’t been tested in real-life circumstances. If you’ve ever heard of or watched Dance Moms, you are aware of the competitive world of dancing and the controversial coaching style of Abbey Lee Miller. Perhaps at some point in your life you participated in or currently you participate in competitive sports. Coaches have different styles with some taking a supportive approach and others taking an approach that involves yelling, being demanding, and harsh criticism. Researchers have found that high performing participants in the world of dance, sports and music are not necessarily aware of self-compassion, but when taught about self-compassion they agree that balancing self-compassion strategies with self-criticism is important. Athletes also believe that they need special training from their coach or a specialist to

develop self-compassion skills to practice during challenging moments when self-criticism is particularly likely to occur.¹⁸



Self-Kindness

Humans have a really bad habit of beating ourselves up. As the saying goes, we are often our own worst enemies. Self-kindness is simply extending the same level of care and understanding to ourselves as we would to others. Instead of being harsh and judgmental, we are encouraging and supportive. Instead of being critical, we are empathic toward ourselves. Now, this doesn't mean that we just ignore our faults and become narcissistic (excessive interest in oneself), but rather we realistically evaluate ourselves as we discussed in the Mindfulness Exercise earlier.

Common Humanity

The second factor of self-compassion is common humanity, or “seeing one’s experiences as part of the larger human experience rather than seeing them as separating and isolating.”¹⁹ As Kristen Naff and Christopher Germer realize, we’re all flawed works in progress.²⁰ No one is perfect. No one is ever perfect. We all make mistakes (some big, some small). We’re also all going to experience pain and suffering in our lives. Being self-compassionate means approaching this pain and suffering with an open mind, seeing it for what it is: a natural part of being human. “The pain I feel in difficult times is the same pain you feel in difficult times. The circumstances are different, the degree of pain is different, but the basic experience of human suffering is the same.”²¹

Mindfulness

The final factor of self-compassion is mindfulness. Although Naff defines mindfulness in the same terms we’ve been discussing in this text, she specifically addresses mindfulness as a factor in pain, defining it, with regard to self-compassion, as “holding one’s painful thoughts and feelings in balanced awareness rather than over-identifying with them.”²² Essentially, Naff argues that mindfulness is an essential part of self-compassion because we must recognize and acknowledge when we’re suffering so we can respond with compassion to ourselves.

Don't Feed the Vulture

One area that we know can hurt someone's self-esteem is what Sidney Simon calls "vulture statements." According to Simon,

Vulture ('vul-cher) noun. 1: any of various large birds of prey that are related to the haws, eagles and falcons, but with the head usually naked of feathers and that subsist chiefly or entirely on dead flesh.²³

Unfortunately, all of us have vultures circling our heads or just sitting on our shoulders. In Figure 3.5, we see a young woman feeding an apple to her vulture. This apple represents all of the negative things we say about ourselves during a day. Many of us spend our entire days feeding our vultures with self-deprecating, negative thoughts and statements. Admittedly, these negative thoughts "come from only one place. They grow out of other people's criticisms, from the negative responses to what we do and say, and the way we act."²⁴ We

have the choice to either let these thoughts consume us or fight them. According to Virginia Richmond, Jason Wrench, and Joan Gorham, the following are characteristic statements that vultures wait to hear so they can feed (see also Figure 3.6):

- Oh boy, do I look awful today; I look like I've been up all night.
- Oh, this is going to be an awful day.
- I've already messed up. I left my students' graded exams at home.
- Boy, I should never have gotten out of bed this morning.
- Gee whiz. I did an awful job of teaching that unit.
- Why can't I do certain things as well as Mr. Smith next door?
- Why am I always so dumb?
- I can't believe I'm a teacher; why, I have the mentality of a worm.
- I don't know why I ever thought I could teach.
- I can't get anything right.
- Good grief, what am I doing here? Why didn't I select any easy job?
- I am going nowhere, doing nothing; I am a failure at teaching.
- In fact, I am a failure in most things I attempt.²⁵

Do any of these vulture statements sound familiar to you? If you're like us, I'm sure they do. Part of self-compassion is learning to recognize these vulture statements when they appear in our minds



Figure 3.5 Don't Feed the Vulture

and evaluate them critically. Ben Martin proposes four ways to challenge vulture statements (negative self-talk):

1. Reality testing
 - What is my evidence for and against my thinking?
 - Are my thoughts factual, or are they just my interpretations?
 - Am I jumping to negative conclusions?
 - How can I find out if my thoughts are actually true?
2. Look for alternative explanations
 - Are there any other ways that I could look at this situation?
 - What else could this mean?
 - If I were being positive, how would I perceive this situation?
3. Putting it in perspective
 - Is this situation as bad as I am making out to be?
 - What is the worst thing that could happen? How likely is it?
 - What is the best thing that could happen?
 - What is most likely to happen?
 - Is there anything good about this situation?
 - Will this matter in five years?
4. Using goal-directed thinking
 - Is thinking this way helping me to feel good or to achieve my goals?
 - What can I do that will help me solve the problem?
 - Is there something I can learn from this situation, to help me do it better next time?²⁶

So, the next time those vultures circle you, check that negative self-talk. When we can stop these patterns of negativity toward ourselves and practice self-compassion, we can begin to pluck the feathers of those vultures. The more we treat ourselves with self-compassion and work against those vulture statements, the smaller and smaller those vultures get. Our vultures may never die, but we can make them much, much smaller.

Research Spotlight



In 2018, Laura Umphrey and John Sherblom examined the relationship between social communication competence, self-compassion, and hope. The goal of the study was to see if someone's social communication competence could predict their ability to engage in self-compassion. Ultimately, the researchers found individuals who engaged in socially competent communication behaviors were more likely to engage in self-compassion, which "suggests that a person who can learn to speak with others competently, initiate conversations, engage others in



Figure 3.6 Don't Feed the Vulture

social interaction, and be more outgoing, while managing verbal behavior and social roles, may also experience greater personal self-compassion” (p. 29).

Umphrey, L. R., & Sherblom, J. C. (2018). The constitutive relationship of social communication competence to self-compassion and hope. *Communication Research Reports*, 35(1), 22–32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08824096.2017.1361395>

Key Takeaways

- Perception is the process through which individuals select, organize, and interpret sensory information to create a meaningful picture of the world. In interpersonal communication, perception shapes how we understand others and how we respond in conversations. Our perceptions act as filters, influencing the way we receive and interpret messages.
- The perception process includes three stages: attending (focusing on specific stimuli),

organizing (categorizing and structuring information), and interpreting (assigning meaning based on context and prior experience). Together, these stages explain how we make sense of the people and events around us during communication.

- Personal experiences, emotions, cultural background, and psychological states influence how we perceive others. For example, past trauma may lead someone to interpret neutral comments as hostile, while someone in a positive emotional state may perceive ambiguous feedback more favorably. These internal filters shape the accuracy and tone of our interpersonal communication.
- Because perception is subjective, it can lead to misunderstandings in communication. Two people may interpret the same message differently, based on their individual internal filters and experiences. Recognizing that everyone views interactions through their own unique lens is critical to improving clarity, empathy, and effectiveness in communication.
- When analyzing real-world communication, applying knowledge of perception allows us to understand why people behave and respond as they do. By considering others' perspectives and perceptual influences, we can better navigate conflict, build stronger relationships, and reduce bias in our interactions.

Exercises

1. Pull out a piece of paper and conduct the “Who Am I?” exercise created by Manford Kuhn. Once you have completed the exercise, categorize your list using Kuhn’s five distinct categories about an individual: social group an individual belongs to, ideological beliefs, personal interests, personal ambitions, and self-evaluations. After categorizing your list, ask yourself what your list says about your self-concept, self-image, self-esteem, and self-respect.
2. Complete the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (<http://www.wwnorton.com/college/psych/psychsci/media/rosenberg.htm>). After receiving your results, do you agree with them? Why or why not? Why do you think you scored the way you did on the measure?

Personality and Perception in Intrapersonal Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Distinguish between personality and temperament by defining each concept and explaining their key differences.
2. Identify the four common four-type temperament models found in research and pop culture.
3. Classify traits as cognitive dispositions or personal-social dispositions.
4. Describe how genetic and environmental factors influence communication traits.
5. Explain how specific dispositions (e.g., emotional intelligence, empathy, self-monitoring) affect interpersonal communication.

After the previous discussions of self-concept, self-image, and self-esteem, it should be clear that the statements and judgments of others, as well as your view of yourself, can impact your communication with others. Additional factors, such as your personality and perception, also influence communication. Let us next examine these factors and their influence on communication.

Personality

Personality is defined as the combination of traits or qualities—such as behavior, emotional stability, and mental attributes—that make a person unique. Before going further, let's quickly examine some of the research related to personality. John Daly categorizes personality into four general categories: cognitive dispositions, personal-social dispositions, communicative dispositions, and relational dispositions.²⁷ Before we delve into these four categories of personality, let's take a quick look at two common themes in this area of research: nature or nurture and temperament.

Nature or Nurture

One of the oldest debates in personality research is whether a specific behavior or thought process occurs within an individual due to their nature (genetics) or nurture (the way they were raised). The first person to investigate this phenomenon was Sir Francis Galton in the 1870s.²⁸ In 1875, Galton sought out twins and their families to learn more about similarities and differences. As a whole, Galton found that there were more similarities than differences: "There is no escape from the conclusion that nature prevails enormously over nurture when the differences of nurture do not exceed what is commonly to be found among persons of the same rank of society and in the same country."²⁹ However, Galton's twin participants had been raised together, so parsing out nature and nur-

ture (despite Galton's attempts) wasn't completely possible. Although Galton's anecdotes provided some interesting stories, that's all they amounted to.

Minnesota Twins Raised Apart

So, how does one determine if something is ultimately nature or nurture? The next breakthrough in this line of research started in the late 1970s when Thomas J. Bouchard and his colleagues at Minnesota State University began studying twins who were raised separately.³⁰ This research started when a pair of twins, Jim Lewis and Jim Springer, were featured in an article on February 19, 1979, in the *Lima News* in Lima, Ohio.³¹ Jim and Jim were placed in an adoption agency and separated from each other at four weeks of age. They grew up just 40 miles away from each other, but they never knew the other one existed. Jess and Sarah Springer and Ernest and Lucille Lewis were looking to adopt, and both sets of parents were told that their Jim had been a twin, but they were also told that his twin had died. Many adoption agencies believed that placing twins with couples was difficult, so this practice of separating twins at birth was an inside practice that the adoptive parents knew nothing about. Jim Lewis' mother had found out that Jim's twin was still alive when he was a toddler, so Jim Lewis knew he had a twin but didn't seek him out until he was 39 years old. Jim Springer learned that he had been a twin when he was eight years old, but he believed the original narrative that his twin had died.

Jim Springer was pretty shocked when he received a telephone message with his twin's contact information out of nowhere one day. The February 19th article in the *Lima News* was initially supposed to be a profile piece on one of the Springers' brothers. Still, the reporter covering the wedding found Lewis and Springer's tale fascinating. The reporter found several striking similarities between the twins:³²

- Their favorite subject in school was math
- Both hated spelling in school
- Their favorite vacation spot was Pas Grille Beach in Florida
- Both had previously been in law enforcement
- They both enjoyed carpentry as a hobby
- Both were married to women named Betty
- Both were divorced from women named Linda
- Both had a dog named "Toy"
- Both started suffering from tension headaches when they were 18
- Even their sons' names were oddly similar (James Alan and James Allan)

This sensationalist story caught the attention of Bouchard because it provided an opportunity for him and his colleagues to study the influence of rearing on twins in a way that wasn't possible when studying twins who were raised together.

Over the next decade, Bouchard and his team of researchers would seek and interview over 100 different pairs of twins or sets of triplets who had been raised apart.³³ The researchers compared those twins to twins who were reared together. Overall, they found more similarities between the two twin groups than differences. This set of studies is one of many that have been conducted using twins over the years to help us understand the interrelationship between rearing and genetics.

Twin Research in Communication

In communication, the first major twin study published was conducted by Cary Wecht Horvath in 1995.³⁴ In her study, Horvath compared 62 pairs of identical twins and 42 pairs of fraternal twins to see if they differed in terms of their communicator style, or “the way one verbally, nonverbally, and paraverbally interacts to signal how literal meaning should be taken, filtered, or understood.”³⁵ Ultimately, Horvath found that identical twins’ communicator styles were more similar than those of fraternal twins. Hence, a good proportion of someone’s communicator style appears to be a result of someone’s genetic makeup. However, this is not to say that genetics was the only factor at play about someone’s communicator style.

Other research in communication has examined how a range of different communication variables are associated with genetics when analyzed through twin studies:^{36,37,38}

- Interpersonal Affiliation
- Aggressiveness
- Social Anxiety
- Audience Anxiety
- Self-Perceived Communication Competence
- Willingness to Communicate
- Communicator Adaptability

It’s important to realize that the authors of this book do not assume nor promote that all of our communication is biological. Still, we also cannot dismiss the importance that genetics plays in our communicative behavior and development. Here is our view of the interrelationship between environment and genetics. Imagine we have two twins who were separated at birth. One twin is placed in a middle-class family, where she will be exposed to numerous opportunities. The other twin, on the other hand, was placed with a lower-income family where the opportunities she will have in life are more limited. The first twin attends a school that has a lot of money and award-winning teachers. The second twin attends an inner-city school where there aren’t enough textbooks for the students, and the school struggles with recruiting and retaining qualified teachers. The first student has the opportunity to engage in a wide range of extracurricular activities both in school (mock UN, debate, student council, etc.) and out of school (traveling softball club, skiing, yoga, etc.). The second twin’s school doesn’t have the budget for extracurricular activities, and her family cannot afford out-of-school activities, so she ends up taking a job when she’s a teenager. Now imagine that these twins are naturally aggressive. The first twin’s aggressiveness may be exhibited by her need to win in both mock UN and debate; she may also strive not only to sit on the student council but also to be its president. In this respect, she shows more prosocial forms of aggression. The second twin doesn’t have these more prosocial outlets for her aggression. As such, her aggression may be demonstrated through more interpersonal problems with her family, teachers, friends, etc. Instead of having those more positive outlets for her aggression, she may become more physically aggressive in her day-to-day life. We believe that the context and world in which a child is raised are very important in determining how they display communicative behaviors, even if those communicative behaviors have biological underpinnings.

Temperament Types

Temperament is the genetic predisposition that causes an individual to behave, react, and think specifically. The notion that people have different temperaments dates back to the Greek physician Hippocrates, known today as the father of medicine, who first wrote of four temperaments in 370 BCE: sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic, and melancholic. Although closely related, temperament and personality refer to two different constructs. Jan Strelau explains that temperament and personality differ in five specific ways:

1. Temperament is biologically determined, whereas the social environment shapes personality.
2. Temperamental features may be identified from early childhood, whereas personality is shaped in later periods of development.
3. Individual differences in temperamental traits, such as anxiety, extraversion-introversion, and stimulus-seeking, are also observed in animals, whereas personality is considered a prerogative of humans.
4. Temperament stands for stylistic aspects. Personality is the content aspect of behavior.
5. Unlike temperament, personality refers to the integrative function of human behavior.³⁹

In 1978, David Keirsey developed the Keirsey Temperament Sorter. This questionnaire combines the Myers-Briggs Temperament Indicator with a model of four temperament types developed by psychiatrist Ernst Kretschmer in the early 20th century.⁴⁰ Take a minute and go to David Keirsey's website and complete his four-personality type questionnaire (<http://www.keirsey.com/sorter/register.aspx>). You'll also be able to learn a lot more about the four-type personality system.

In reality, numerous four-type personality systems have been created over the years. Table 3.1 presents several four-type personality systems currently available on the market. Each one has its quirks and patterns, but the basic results are the same.

Table 3.1. Comparing 4-Personality Types

System	Personalities			
Hippocrates Greek Terms	Sanguine	Melancholy	Choleric	Phlegmatic
Wired that Way	Popular Sanguine	Perfect Melancholy	Powerful Choleric	Peaceful Phlegmatic
Keirsey Temperament (1967)	Artisan Sensation Seeking	Rational Knowledge Seeking	Guardian Security Seeking	Idealist Identity Seeking
Carl Jung's Theory (1921)	Feeling	Thinking	Sensing	Intuition
Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (1962)	Feeler Extravert	Thinker Introvert	Intuitiver Extravert	Sensor Introvert
"What's My Style?" (WMS)	Spirited	Systematic	Direct	Considerate

System	Personalities			
The P's	Popular	Perfect	Powerful	Peaceful
The S's	Spirited	Systematic	Self-propelled	Solid
The A's	Active	Analytical	Administrative	Amiable
LEAD Test	Expressor	Analyst	Leader	Dependable
Biblical Characters	Peter	Moses	Paul	Abraham
DiSC	Influencing of Others	Cautiousness/ Compliance	Dominance	Steadiness
McCarthy/ 4MAT System	Dynamic	Analytic	Common Sense	Innovative
Plato (340 BC)	Artisan	Scientist	Guardian	Philosopher
Enneagram	Helper Romantic	Asserter Perfectionist	Adventurer Achiever	Peacemaker Observer
True Colors	Orange	Gold	Green	Blue
Children's Literature	Tigger	Eeyore	Rabbit	Pooh
Charlie Brown Characters	Snoopy	Linus	Lucy	Charlie Brown
<i>Who Moved My Cheese?</i>	Scurry	Hem	Sniff	Haw
LEAD Test	Expresser	Analyst	Leader	Dependable
Eysenck's EPQ-R	High Extravert Low Neurotic	Low Extravert High Neurotic	High Extravert High Neurotic	Low Extravert Low Neurotic

And before you ask, none of the research examining the four types has found clear sex differences among the patterns. Females and males are seen proportionately in all four categories.

For example, training publisher HRDQ publishes the “What’s My Style?” series (<http://www.hrdqstore.com/Style>), which applies the four personal styles to various workplace issues, including coaching, communication, leadership, learning, selling, teams, and time management.

David Keirsey argues that the consistent use of the four temperament types (regardless of the terms used) indicates the long-standing tradition and complexity of these ideas.⁴¹

The Big Five

In the world of personality, one of the most commonly discussed concepts in research is the Big Five. In the late 1950s, Ernest C. Tupes and Raymond E. Christal conducted a series of studies examining a model of personality.^{42,43} Ultimately, they found five consistent personality clusters they labeled: surgency, agreeableness, dependability, emotional stability, and culture). Listed below are the five broad personality categories with the personality trait words in parentheses that were associated with these categories:

1. Surgency (silent vs. talkative; secretive vs. frank; cautious vs. adventurous; submissive vs. assertive; and languid, slow vs. energetic)
2. Agreeableness (spiteful vs. good-natured; obstructive vs. cooperative; suspicious vs. trustful; rigid vs. adaptable; cool, aloof vs. attentive to people; jealous vs. not so; demanding vs. emotionally mature; self-willed vs. mild; and hard, stern vs. kindly)
3. Dependability (frivolous vs. responsible and unscrupulous vs. conscientious; indolent vs. insistently orderly; quitting vs. persevering; and unconventional vs. conventional)
4. Emotional Stability (worrying, anxious vs. placid; easily upset vs. poised, tough; changeable vs. emotionally stable; neurotic vs. not so; hypochondriacal vs. not so; and emotional vs. calm)
5. Culture (boorish vs. intellectual, cultured; clumsy, awkward vs. polished; immature vs. independent-minded; lacking artistic feelings vs. aesthetically fastidious, practical, logical vs. imaginative)

Although Tupes and Christal were first, they were not the only psychologists researching the idea of personality clusters.

Two other researchers, Robert R. McCrae and Paul T. Costa, expanded on Tupes and Christal's work to create the OCEAN Model of personality. McCrae and Costa originally started examining just three parts of the model, openness, neuroticism, and extraversion.⁴⁴ The model was later expanded to include both conscientiousness and agreeableness (Figure 3.7).⁴⁵ Before progressing forward, take a minute and complete one of the many different freely available tests of the Five Factor Model of Personality:

- <https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/personality-quiz/>,
- <https://openpsychometrics.org/tests/IPIP-BFFM/>,

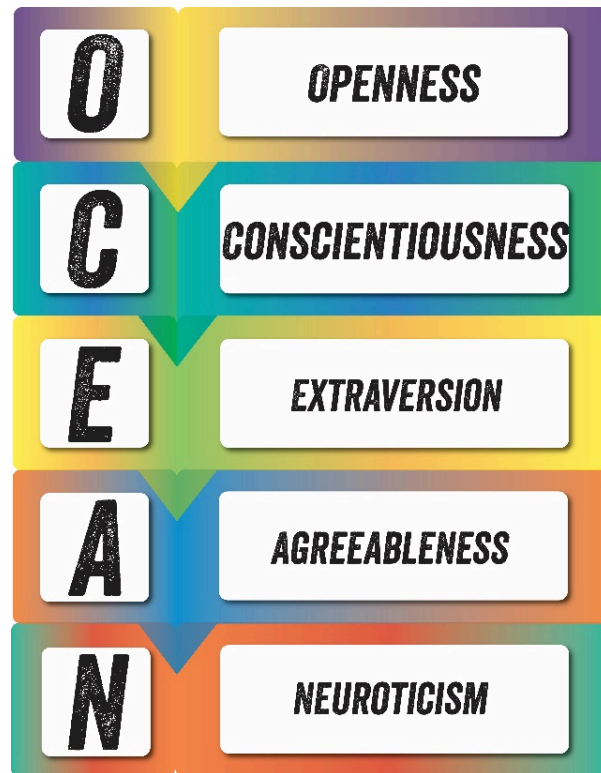


Figure 3.6 Big Five Personality Traits

- <https://www.123test.com/personality-test/>,
- <https://www.idrlabs.com/big-five-subscales/test.php>

Openness

Openness refers to “openness to experience,” or the idea that some people are more welcoming of new things. These people will challenge their underlying life assumptions and are more likely to be amenable to differing points of view. Table 3.2 explores some traits associated with having both high levels of openness and having low levels of openness.

Table 3.2. Openness

High Openness	Low Openness
Original	Conventional
Creative	Down to Earth
Complex	Narrow Interests
Curious	Unadventurous
Prefer Variety	Conforming
Independent	Traditional
Liberal	Unartistic

Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness is the degree to which an individual is aware of their actions and how their actions impact other people. Table 3.3 explores some traits associated with having both high levels of conscientiousness and low levels of conscientiousness.

Table 3.3. Conscientiousness

High Conscientiousness	Low Conscientiousness
Careful	Negligent
Reliable	Disorganized
Hard-Working	Impractical
Self-Disciplined	Thoughtless
Punctual	Playful
Deliberate	Quitting
Knowledgeable	Uncultured

Extraversion

Extraversion is the degree to which someone is sociable and outgoing. Table 3.4 explores some traits associated with having both high levels of extraversion and low levels of extraversion.

Table 3.4. Extraversion

High Extraversion	Low Extraversion
Sociable	Sober
Fun Loving	Reserved
Friendly	Quiet
Talkative	Unfeeling
Warm	Lonely
Person-Oriented	Task-Oriented
Dominant	Timid

Agreeableness

Agreeableness refers to the degree to which someone engages in prosocial behaviors, such as altruism, cooperation, and compassion. Table 3.5 examines some traits associated with having both high and low levels of agreeableness.

Table 3.5. Agreeableness

High Agreeableness	Low Agreeableness
Good-Natured	Irritable
Soft Hearted	Selfish
Sympathetic	Suspicious
Forgiving	Critical
Open-Minded	Disagreeable
Flexible	Cynical
Humble	Manipulative

Neuroticism

Neuroticism is the degree to which an individual is vulnerable to anxiety, depression, and emotional instability. Table 3.6 examines some traits associated with having both high and low levels of neuroticism.

Table 3.6. Neuroticism

High Neuroticism	Low Neuroticism
Nervous	Calm
High-Strung	Unemotional
Impatient	Secure
Envious/Jealous	Comfortable
Self-Conscious	Not impulse ridden
Temperamental	Hardy
Subjective	Relaxed

Research Spotlight



In 2018, Yukti Mehta and Richard Hicks set out to examine the relationship between the Big Five Personality Types (openness, conscientiousness, agreeableness, extroversion, & neuroticism) and the Five Facets of Mindfulness Measure (observation, description, aware actions, non-judgmental inner experience, & nonreactivity).⁴⁶

For this study, the researchers combined the five facets of mindfulness into a single score. The researchers found that openness, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and extroversion were positively correlated with mindfulness, whereas neuroticism was negatively correlated with mindfulness.

Cognitive Dispositions

Cognitive dispositions refer to general patterns of mental processes that impact how people respond and react to the world around them. These dispositions (or one’s natural mental or emotional outlook) take on several forms. For our purposes, we’ll briefly examine the four identified by John Daly: locus of control, cognitive complexity, authoritarianism/dogmatism, and emotional intelligence.⁴⁷

Locus of Control

One’s **locus of control** refers to an individual’s perceived control over their behavior and life circumstances. We refer to two different loci when discussing locus of control. First, we have people who have an internal locus of control. People with an **internal locus of control** believe that they

can control their behavior and life circumstances. For example, people with an internal dating locus of control would believe that their dating lives are ultimately a result of their behavior and decisions regarding dating. My dating life exists because of my choices. The opposite of internal locus of control is the **external locus of control**, or the belief that an individual's behavior and circumstances exist because of forces outside the individual's control. An individual with an external dating locus of control would believe that their dating life is a matter of luck or divine intervention. This individual would also be more likely to blame outside forces if their dating life isn't going as desired. We'll periodically revisit locus of control in this text because of its importance in a wide variety of interpersonal interactions.

Cognitive Complexity

According to John Daly, cognitive “complexity has been defined in terms of the number of different constructs an individual has to describe others (differentiation), the degree to which those constructs cohere (integration), and the level of abstraction of the constructs (abstractiveness).”⁴⁸ By differentiation, we are talking about the number of distinctions or separate elements an individual can utilize to recognize and interpret an event. For example, in the world of communication, someone who can effectively attend to another individual's body language can differentiate large amounts of nonverbal data to understand how another person is thinking or feeling. Someone with low differentiation may only understand a few pronounced nonverbal behaviors.

Integration refers to an individual's ability to see connections or relationships among the various elements he or she has differentiated. It's one thing to recognize several unique nonverbal behaviors, but it's the ability to interpret nonverbal behaviors that enables someone to be genuinely aware of someone else's body language. It would be one thing if I could recognize that someone is smiling, an eyebrow is going up, the head is tilted, and someone's arms are crossed in front. Still, if I cannot see all these unique behaviors as a total package, then I won't be able to interpret this person's actual nonverbal behavior.

The last part of Daly's definition involves the ability to see levels of abstraction. Abstraction refers to something that exists apart from concrete realities, specific objects, or actual instances. For example, suppose someone comes right out and verbally tells you that they disagree with something you said. In that case, this person is concretely communicating disagreement; as the receiver of the disagreement, it should be relatively easy to interpret the disagreement. If someone doesn't tell you he or she disagrees with what you've said but provides only small nonverbal cues of disagreement, being able to interpret those theoretical cues is attending to communicative behavior that is considerably more abstract.

Overall, cognitive complexity is a critical cognitive disposition because it directly impacts interpersonal relationships. According to Brant Burleson and Scott Caplan, cognitive complexity impacts several interpersonal constructs:⁴⁹

1. Form more detailed and organized impressions of others;
2. Better able to remember impressions of others;
3. Better able to resolve inconsistencies in information about others;
4. Learn complex social information quickly; and

5. Use multiple dimensions of judgment in making social evaluations.

These findings clearly demonstrate that cognitive complexity is crucial in determining an individual's ability to understand and make judgments about others in interpersonal interactions.

Authoritarianism/Dogmatism

According to Jason Wrench, James C. McCroskey, and Virginia Richmond, two personality characteristics that commonly impact interpersonal communication are authoritarianism and dogmatism.⁵⁰ **Authoritarianism** is a form of social organization where individuals favor absolute obedience to authority (or authorities) as opposed to individual freedom. The highly authoritarian individual believes that individuals should just knowingly submit to their power. Individuals who believe in authoritarianism but are not in power believe that others should submit themselves to those who have power.

Dogmatism, although closely related, is distinct from authoritarianism. **Dogmatism** is defined as the inclination to believe one's point of view as undeniably true based on faulty premises and without consideration of evidence and the opinions of others. Individuals who are highly dogmatic believe there is generally only one point of view on a specific topic, and it's their point of view. Highly dogmatic individuals typically view the world in terms of "black and white" while missing most of the shades of gray that exist between. Dogmatic individuals impose their beliefs on others and refuse to consider any variation or debate about these beliefs, which can lead to strained interpersonal relationships. Both authoritarianism and dogmatism "tap into the same broad idea: Some people are more rigid than others, and this rigidity affects both how they communicate and how they respond to communication."⁵¹

One closely related term that has received some minor exploration in interpersonal communication is right-wing authoritarianism. According to Bob Altemeyer in his book *The Authoritarians* (<https://theauthoritarians.org/>), **right-wing authoritarians** (RWAs) tend to have three specific characteristics:

1. RWAs believe in submitting themselves to individuals they perceive as established and legitimate authorities.
2. RWAs adhere strictly to social and cultural norms.
3. RWAs become aggressive toward those who do not submit to established, legitimate authorities and those who violate social and cultural norms.

Please understand that Altemeyer's use of the term "right-wing" does not imply the same political connotation that is often associated with it in the United States. As Altemeyer explains, "Because the submission occurs to traditional authority, I call these followers *right*-wing authoritarians. I'm using the word "right" in one of its earliest meanings, for in Old English 'right'(pronounced 'writ') as an adjective meant lawful, proper, correct, doing what the authorities said of others."⁵² Under this definition, right-wing authoritarianism perfectly combines both dogmatism and authoritarianism.

Right-wing authoritarianism has been linked to several interpersonal variables. For example, parents/guardians who are RWAs are more likely to believe in a highly dogmatic approach to parenting. In contrast, those who are not RWAs tend to be more permissive in their approaches to parent-

ing.⁵³ Another study found that men with high levels of RWA were more likely to have been sexually aggressive in the past and were more likely to report sexually aggressive intentions for the future.⁵⁴ Men with high RWA scores tend to be considerably more sexist and believe in highly traditional sex roles, which impacts how they communicate and interact with women.⁵⁵ Overall, RWA tends to negatively impact interpersonal interactions with anyone who does not see an individual's specific worldview and does not come from their cultural background.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is an individual's appraisal and expression of their emotions and the emotions of others in a manner that enhances thought, living, and communicative interactions. Emotional intelligence, while not a new concept, really became popular after Daniel Goleman's book, *Emotional Intelligence*.⁵⁶ Social psychologists had been interested in and studying the importance of emotions long before Goleman's book, but his book seemed to shed new light on an old idea.⁵⁷ Goleman drew quite a bit on a framework that was created by two social psychologists named Peter Salovey and John Mayer, who had coined the term "emotional intelligence" in an article in 1990.⁵⁸ In the Salovey and Mayer framework for emotional intelligence, emotional intelligence consisted of four basic processes. Figure 3.8 pictorially demonstrates the four basic parts of Salovey and Mayer's Emotional Intelligence Model.

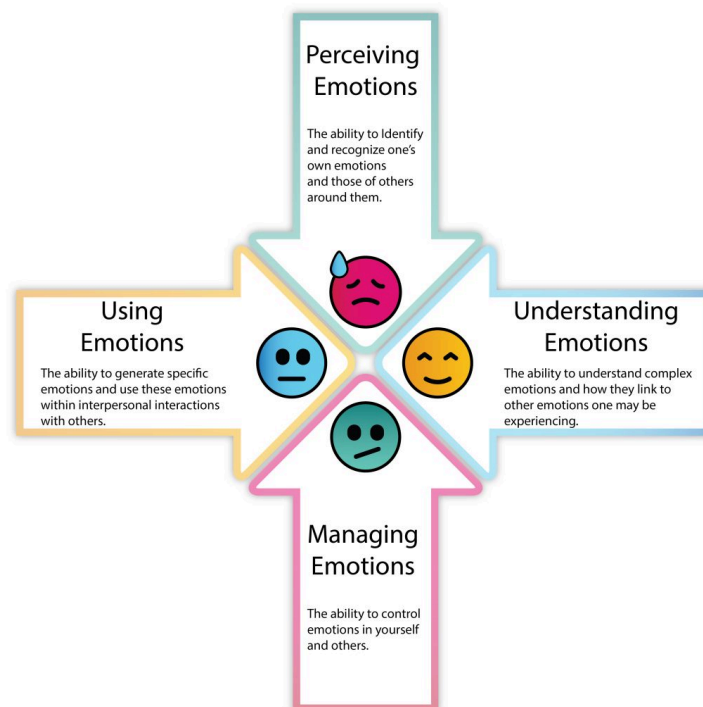


Figure 3.8 Salovey and Mayer's Emotional Intelligence Model

Emotional intelligence (EQ) is crucial for effective interpersonal communication, as individuals with higher EQ tend to be more sociable and less socially anxious. Due to both their sociability and

lower anxiety, individuals with a high EQ are more socially skilled and tend to have higher quality interpersonal relationships.

A closely related communication construct originally coined by Melanie and Steven Booth-Butterfield is **affective orientation**.⁵⁹ As it is conceptualized by the Booth-Butterfields, affective orientation (AO) is “the degree to which people are aware of their emotions, perceive them as important, and actively consider their affective responses in making judgments and interacting with others.”⁶⁰ Under the auspices of AO, the general assumption is that highly affective-oriented people are (1) cognitively aware of their own and others’ emotions, and (2) can implement emotional information in communication with others. Not surprisingly, the Booth-Butterfields found that highly affective-oriented individuals also reported greater affect intensity in their relationships.

Melanie and Steven Booth-Butterfield later furthered their understanding of AO by examining it in terms of how an individual’s emotions drive their decisions in life.⁶¹ As the Booth-Butterfields explain, in their further conceptualization of AO, they “are primarily interested in those individuals who not only sense and value their emotions but scrutinize and give them weight to direct behavior.”⁶² In this sense, the Booth-Butterfields are expanding our notion of AO by explaining that some individuals use their emotions as a guiding force for their behaviors and their lives. On the other end of the spectrum, you have individuals who use no emotional information in how they behave and guide their lives. Although relatively little research has examined AO, the conducted research indicates its importance in interpersonal relationships. For example, in one study, individuals who viewed their parents/guardians as having high AO levels reported more open communication with those parents/guardians.⁶³

Personal-Social Dispositions

Social-personal dispositions refer to general patterns of mental processes that impact how people socially relate to others or view themselves. The following dispositions impact how people interact with others, but they do so from very different places. Without delving too deeply, we will examine the seven personal-social dispositions identified by John Daly.⁶⁴

Loneliness

The first social-personal disposition is **loneliness** or an individual’s emotional distress that results from a feeling of solitude or isolation from social relationships. Loneliness can be categorized into two forms: emotional and social. **Emotional loneliness** results when an individual feels that he or she does not have an emotional connection with others. We get these emotional connections through our associations with loved ones and close friends. If an individual is estranged from their family or doesn’t have close friendships, they may feel lonely because of a lack of these emotional connections. **Social loneliness** results from a lack of a satisfying social network. Imagine you’re someone who has historically been very social. Still, you move to a new city and find building new social relationships very difficult because the people in the new location are very cliquish. The inability to develop a new social network can lead someone to feelings of loneliness because they may feel a sense of social boredom or marginalization.

Loneliness tends to impact people in several ways, both interpersonally and intrapersonally. Some of the general research findings associated with loneliness have showed that these people have lower self-esteem, are more socially passive, are more sensitive to rejection from others, and are often less socially skilled. Interestingly, lonely individuals attribute their interpersonal failures to an internal locus of control and their interpersonal successes to an external locus of control.⁶⁵

Take a few moments and complete the Social Connection and Solitude Scale (SCSS) located in Figure 3.9. Before proceeding, it's essential to note that the SCSS is not a diagnostic tool and was developed for this book based on a range of measures designed to assess aspects of loneliness, social isolation, and solitude. This will give you a general idea of your perceptions of loneliness, social isolation, and solitude, but is not intended to diagnose these phenomena as much as it gets you thinking about the concepts involved.

Social Connection and Solitude Scale (SCSS)

Instructions: This instrument is composed of thirty-six statements concerning feelings about social connection, communication, and solitude. Please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you by marking whether you:

Never True	Rarely True	Sometimes True	Often True	Almost Always True
1	2	3	4	5

Work quickly; record your first impression.

- _____ 1. I sense a meaningful bond exists between me and others in my life.
- _____ 2. The depth of my relationships satisfies my need for connection.
- _____ 3. I experience warmth in my interactions with others.
- _____ 4. My emotional needs for closeness are being met.
- _____ 5. I feel understood by the people around me.
- _____ 6. There's a mutual care between me and others that I value.
- _____ 7. I'm included in social activities that matter to me.
- _____ 8. My presence is welcomed in group settings.
- _____ 9. I participate in shared experiences with others.
- _____ 10. I'm part of communities that align with my interests.
- _____ 11. Others actively invite me to join their activities.
- _____ 12. I contribute to groups in ways that feel meaningful.

- _____ 13. My typical day includes meaningful exchanges with others.
- _____ 14. I engage in conversations that go beyond surface level.
- _____ 15. Digital and in-person interactions keep me connected throughout the week.
- _____ 16. I have regular opportunities to share my thoughts and feelings.
- _____ 17. My communication with others flows naturally and comfortably.
- _____ 18. I maintain ongoing dialogues with people who matter to me.
- _____ 19. Practical help is available to me when challenges arise.
- _____ 20. I can reach out successfully when I need emotional support.
- _____ 21. My support network responds when I'm struggling.
- _____ 22. Resources for assistance are within my reach.
- _____ 23. I know where to turn during difficult times.
- _____ 24. Help arrives in forms that actually meet my needs.
- _____ 25. Time alone allows me to recharge effectively.
- _____ 26. Solitary moments contribute to my personal growth.
- _____ 27. I use quiet time for meaningful self-reflection.
- _____ 28. Being alone helps me process my experiences.
- _____ 29. I find creative inspiration in solitude.
- _____ 30. My alone time enhances my overall well-being.
- _____ 31. The lack of connection in my life causes me pain.
- _____ 32. My limited social contact creates persistent sadness.
- _____ 33. I struggle with the emptiness of minimal human interaction.
- _____ 34. The absence of meaningful relationships weighs heavily on me.
- _____ 35. My disconnection from others disrupts my daily functioning.
- _____ 36. The gap between my desired and actual social life troubles me.

Scoring:

To compute subscale scores, sum the items for each subscale as indicated below.

- Emotional Connection: Sum of items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, & 6
- Social Integration: Sum of items 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, & 12
- Communication Engagement: Sum of items 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, & 18

- Support Accessibility: Sum of items 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, & 24
- Solitude Appreciation: Sum of items 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, & 30
- Isolation Distress: Sum of items 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, & 36

Emotional Connection Score: _____

Social Integration Score: _____

Communication Engagement Score: _____

Support Accessibility Score: _____

Solitude Appreciation Score: _____

Isolation Distress Score: _____

To obtain your Total **Social Connection Score**, add the scores for Emotional Connection, Social Integration, Communication Engagement, and Support Accessibility: _____

To obtain your **Communication Isolation Score**, subtract your Communication Engagement score from 30: _____

To obtain your **Solitude Balance Score**, subtract your Isolation Distress score from your Solitude Appreciation score: _____

Norms for the SCSS:

Total Social Connection Score: Scores range from 24-120

- High connection: 96-120
- Moderate connection: 72-95
- Low connection: 48-71
- Very low connection: 24-47

Communication Isolation Score: Scores range from 0-24

- Minimal isolation: 0-6
- Mild isolation: 7-12
- Moderate isolation: 13-18
- Severe isolation: 19-24

Solitude Balance Score: Scores range from -30 to +30

- Positive balance (healthy solitude): +10 to +30
- Neutral balance: -9 to +9
- Negative balance (distressing isolation): -30 to -10

Based On:

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Subscale Definitions for the SCSS

Now that you've completed the SCSS, let's look at the various subscales measured in the SCSS.

Emotional Connection

The degree to which an individual experiences deep, meaningful bonds characterized by mutual understanding, warmth, and care in their relationships. This subscale measures the quality and emotional depth of interpersonal connections rather than their quantity. High scores indicate feeling understood, valued, and emotionally close to others, while low scores suggest a lack of intimate, fulfilling relationships.

Social Integration

The extent to which an individual is actively included and participates in social groups, communities, and shared activities. This subscale assesses one's sense of belonging and involvement in social contexts. High scores reflect regular participation in group activities, feeling welcomed by others, and having a meaningful role in social settings. Low scores indicate exclusion from social groups and limited opportunities for shared experiences.

Communication Engagement

The frequency, quality, and ease of verbal and digital interactions an individual has with others. This subscale specifically measures the communicative aspects of social connection, including both the quantity of interactions and their meaningful nature. High scores indicate regular, comfortable, and substantive communication with others across various channels. Low scores suggest minimal communication, difficulty maintaining conversations, or primarily superficial exchanges.

Support Accessibility

The availability and responsiveness of practical and emotional support when needed. This subscale measures whether an individual can successfully access help during challenging times and whether their support network provides assistance that effectively meets their needs. High scores indicate reliable access to various forms of support, while low scores suggest difficulty obtaining help or having unmet support needs.

Solitude Appreciation

The ability to use time alone constructively for personal growth, reflection, and restoration. This subscale measures positive experiences with solitude, including using alone time for creativity, self-

care, and processing experiences. High scores indicate that solitude enhances well-being and personal development, while low scores suggest difficulty finding value or comfort in being alone.

Isolation Distress

The psychological pain and functional impairment resulting from unwanted social disconnection. This subscale measures the negative emotional and practical consequences of inadequate social contact and relationships. High scores indicate significant suffering due to isolation, including sadness, emptiness, and disruption to daily life. Low scores suggest minimal distress from one's current level of social connection.

Composite Score Definitions for the SCSS

The subscales were designed to measure three larger concepts: social connection, communication isolation, and solitude balance. Let's look at these in more detail.

Total Social Connection

A comprehensive measure of an individual's overall connectedness to others, encompassing the emotional quality of relationships, inclusion in social groups, regular communication patterns, and access to support. This composite score reflects the multidimensional nature of human connection, recognizing that true social connection requires not just the presence of others, but meaningful bonds, active participation, ongoing communication, and reliable support. High scores indicate robust social connection across multiple domains of life, while low scores suggest pervasive disconnection that may manifest as loneliness, even when others are physically present.

Communication Isolation

The degree to which an individual lacks regular, meaningful verbal and digital interactions with others. This derived score specifically targets the communicative dimension of social isolation, recognizing that modern isolation often involves minimal daily conversation, few communication partners, and limited opportunities for substantive dialogue. High Communication Isolation scores indicate severe restrictions in daily communication patterns, which may result from physical isolation, social anxiety, lack of social networks, or environmental barriers. This measure is particularly relevant in digital age contexts where someone might be surrounded by people yet experience profound communication deficits.

Solitude Balance

The relationship between an individual's positive experiences with being alone and their distress from unwanted isolation. This differential score recognizes that solitude and loneliness are distinct phenomena—solitude can be restorative and growth-promoting, while isolation can be painful and debilitating. Positive Solitude Balance scores indicate that time alone is experienced as beneficial and chosen, contributing to well-being rather than detracting from it. Negative scores suggest that being alone is predominantly experienced as painful isolation rather than peaceful solitude. A balanced score near zero may indicate either minimal alone time or ambivalence about solitary experiences.

Depression

Depression is a psychological disorder characterized by varying degrees of disappointment, guilt, hopelessness, loneliness, sadness, and self-doubt, all of which negatively impact a person's general mental and physical well-being. Depression (and all of its characteristics) is very difficult to encapsulate in a single definition. If you've ever experienced a major depressive episode, it's a lot easier to understand what depression is compared to those who have never experienced one. Depressed people are less satisfied with life and less satisfied with their interpersonal interactions as well. Research has shown that depression negatively affects all forms of interpersonal relationships: dating, friends, family, work, etc. We will periodically come back to depression as we explore various parts of interpersonal communication.

Self-Esteem

As discussed earlier in this chapter, self-esteem comprises your sense of self-worth and the level of satisfaction you have with yourself; it is how you feel about yourself. A good self-image raises your self-esteem; a poor self-image often results in poor self-esteem, lack of confidence, and insecurity. Not surprisingly, individuals with low self-esteem have more problematic interpersonal relationships.

Narcissism

Ovid's story of Narcissus and Echo has been passed down through the ages. The story starts with a Mountain Nymph named Echo who falls in love with a human named Narcissus. When Echo reveals herself to Narcissus, he rejects her. In true Roman fashion, this slight could not be left unpunished. Echo eventually leads Narcissus to a pool of water where he quickly falls in love with his reflection. He ultimately dies, staring at himself, because he realizes that his love will never be met.

The modern conceptualization of narcissism is based on Ovid's story of Narcissus. Today, researchers view **narcissism** as a psychological condition (or personality disorder) in which a person has a preoccupation with oneself, an inflated sense of one's importance, and a longing for admiration from others. Highly narcissistic individuals are completely self-focused and ignore the communicative needs and emotions of others. In fact, in social situations, highly narcissistic individuals strive to be the center of attention.

Anita Vangelisti, Mark Knapp, and John Daly examined a purely communicative form of narcissism, which they deemed conversational narcissism.⁶⁶ Conversational narcissism is an extreme focusing of one's interests and desires during an interpersonal interaction while completely ignoring the interests and desires of another person: Vangelisti, Knapp, and Daly found four general categories of conversationally narcissistic behavior. First, conversational narcissists inflate their self-importance while displaying an inflated self-image. Some behaviors include bragging, refusing to listen to criticism, praising oneself, etc. Second, conversational narcissists exploit a conversation by attempting to focus the direction of the conversation on topics of interest to them. Some behaviors include talking so fast others cannot interject, shifting the topic to oneself, interrupting others, etc. Third, conversational narcissists are exhibitionists, or they attempt to show off or entertain others

to turn the focus on themselves. Some behaviors include primping or preening, dressing to attract attention, being or laughing louder than others, positioning oneself in the center, etc. Last, conversational narcissists have impersonal relationships. During their interactions with others, conversational narcissists show a lack of caring about another person and a lack of interest in another person. Some common behaviors include “glazing over” while someone else is speaking, appearing impatient while someone is speaking, and looking around the room while someone is speaking, among others. People engaged in interpersonal encounters with conversational narcissists are highly unsatisfied with those interactions.

Machiavellianism

In 1513, Niccolo Machiavelli (Figure 3.10) wrote a text called *The Prince*. Although Machiavelli dedicated the book to Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici, a member of the ruling Florentine Medici family, the book was originally written for Lorenzo's uncle. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli unabashedly describes how he believes leaders should keep power. First, he notes that traditional leadership virtues, such as decency, honor, and trust, should be discarded in favor of a more calculated approach to leadership. Specifically, Machiavelli believed humans were easily manipulated, so ultimately, leaders can either be the ones influencing their followers or wait for someone else to wield that influence in a different direction.

In 1970, two social psychologists, Richard Christie and Florence Geis, investigated whether Machiavelli's ideas were still in practice in the 20th Century.⁶⁷ The basic model that Christie and Geis proposed consisted of four basic Machiavellian characteristics:

1. Lack of affect in interpersonal relationships (relationships are a means to an end).
2. Lack of concern with conventional morality (people are tools to be used in the best way possible).
3. Rational view of others not based on psychopathology (people who actively manipulate others must be logical and rational).
4. Focused on short-term tasks rather than long-range ramifications of behavior (these individuals have little ideological/organizational commitment).

Imagine working with one of these people. Imagine being led by one of these people. Part of their research consisted of creating a research questionnaire to measure one's tendency toward **Machiavellianism**. The questionnaire has undergone several revisions, but the most common one is called the Mach IV (<http://personality-testing.info/tests/MACH-IV.php>).



Figure 3.10 Niccolo Machiavelli

Interpersonally, highly Machiavellian individuals tend to view others as means to an end, using them as stepping stones to achieve their goals. If talking to someone in a particular manner makes that other person feel good about themselves, the Machiavellian has no problem doing this if it helps the Machiavellian get what they want. Ultimately, Machiavellian behavior is very problematic. In interpersonal interactions where the receiver of a Machiavellian's attempt at manipulation is aware of the manipulation, the receiver is highly unsatisfied with these communicative interactions. However, someone who is truly adept at the art of manipulation may be harder to recognize than most people realize.

Empathy

Empathy is the ability to recognize and mutually experience another person's attitudes, emotions, experiences, and thoughts. Highly empathetic individuals possess a unique ability to connect with others interpersonally, as they can genuinely perceive how others view life. Individuals who are unempathetic often struggle to take or understand another person's perspective, resulting in more rigid and less emotionally driven interpersonal interactions. People with high levels of empathy have more successful and rewarding interactions with others compared to those with lower empathy levels. Furthermore, people who are interacting with a highly empathetic person find those interactions more satisfying than when interacting with someone who is unempathetic.

Self-Monitoring

The last of the personal-social dispositions is referred to as self-monitoring. In 1974, Mark Snyder developed his basic theory of **self-monitoring**, which proposes that individuals differ in the degree to which they can control their behaviors following the appropriate social rules and norms involved in interpersonal interaction.⁶⁸ In this theory, Snyder proposes that there are some individuals adept at selecting appropriate behavior in light of the context of a situation, which he deems high self-monitors. High self-monitors want others to view them in a precise manner (impression management), so they enact communicative behaviors that ensure suitable or favorable public appearances. On the other hand, some people are unconcerned with how others view them and will act consistently across differing communicative contexts, despite changes in cultural rules and norms. Snyder called these people low self-monitors.

Interpersonally, high self-monitors tend to have more meaningful and satisfying interactions with others. Conversely, individuals who are low self-monitors have more problematic and less satisfying interpersonal relationships with others. In romantic relationships, high self-monitors develop relational intimacy more quickly than individuals who are low self-monitors. Furthermore, high self-monitors form numerous interpersonal friendships with a diverse range of people. Low-self-monitors may have only a small handful of friends, but these friendships tend to be more meaningful and have greater depth. Furthermore, high self-monitors are also more likely to take on leadership positions and receive promotions within an organization compared to their low self-monitoring counterparts. Overall, self-monitoring is a crucial dispositional characteristic that significantly impacts interpersonal relationships.

Key Takeaways

- Personality is shaped by social and environmental factors and emerges over time, while temperament is biologically based and observable in early life. Despite sharing overlapping traits, they originate from different sources.
- Across history and pop culture, four-type temperament models have consistently emerged—though the labels vary, they reflect enduring patterns in how people behave and interact.
- Traits such as locus of control, cognitive complexity, authoritarianism, and emotional intelligence are considered cognitive dispositions because they influence how people perceive and respond to the world.
- Personal-social dispositions such as empathy, self-monitoring, and narcissism influence how individuals relate to others and perceive themselves in interpersonal interactions.
- Communication traits are influenced by both genetics and environment—twin studies show patterns of similarity in traits like aggressiveness and communicator style, yet contextual factors can moderate how those traits manifest.

Exercises

1. Complete the Keirsey Temperament Sorter®-II (KTS®-II; <https://pro-file.keirsey.com/#/b2c/assessment/start>). After finding out your temperament, reflect on what your temperament says about how you interact with people interpersonally.
2. Watch the following animated video overview of Daniel Goldman's book *Emotional Intelligence* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n6MRsGwyMuQ>). After watching the video, what did you learn about emotional intelligence? How can you apply emotional intelligence in your own life?
3. Complete the Self-Monitoring Scale created by Mark Snyder (<http://personality-testing.info/tests/SM.php>). After finishing the scale, what do your results say about your ability to adapt to changing interpersonal situations and contexts?

Communication & Relational Dispositions

Learning Objectives

1. List and describe the major communication dispositions identified by Daly.
2. Explain the interpersonal effects of approach and avoidance traits (e.g., shyness, communication apprehension, willingness to communicate).
3. Distinguish between argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness in interpersonal settings.
4. Identify the components of sociocommunicative orientation and explain their relevance to relational communication.
5. Summarize key relational dispositions, including attachment styles and rejection sensitivity.

In the previous section, we explored the importance of temperament, cognitive dispositions, and personal-social dispositions. In this section, we will explore the last two dispositions discussed by John Daly: communication and relational dispositions.⁶⁹

Communication Dispositions

Now that we've examined cognitive and personal-social dispositions, we can move on and explore some intrapersonal dispositions studied specifically by communication scholars. **Communication dispositions** are general patterns of communicative behavior. We will explore the nature of introversion/extraversion, approach and avoidance traits, argumentativeness/verbal aggressiveness, and sociocommunicative orientation.

Introversion/Extraversion

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the concept of **introversion/extraversion** has been widely studied by both psychologists and communication researchers. People exist on a continuum that ranges from highly extraverted (an individual's tendency to be talkative, dynamic, and outgoing) to highly introverted (an individual's tendency to be quiet, shy, and more reserved). Before continuing, take a moment to complete the Introversion Scale, created by James C. McCroskey and available on his website (<http://www.jamescmccroskey.com/measures/introversion.htm>). There is considerable research that has found an individual's tendency toward extraversion or introversion to be biologically based.⁷⁰ As such, where you score on the Introversion Scale may largely be a factor of your genetic makeup and not something you can alter greatly.

With interpersonal relationships, individuals who score highly on extraversion are perceived by others as intelligent, friendly, and attractive. As such, extraverts have more opportunities for interpersonal communication; it's not surprising that they have better communicative skills when compared to their more introverted counterparts.

Approach and Avoidance Traits

The second set of communication dispositions is categorized as approach and avoidance traits. According to Virginia Richmond, Jason Wrench, and James McCroskey, approach and avoidance traits depict the tendency an individual has to either approach or avoid situations where they will have to communicate with others.⁷¹ To help us understand the approach and avoidance traits, we'll examine three specific traits commonly discussed by communication scholars: shyness, communication apprehension, and willingness to communicate.

Shyness

In a classic study conducted by Philip Zimbardo, he asked two questions to over 5,000 participants: Do you presently consider yourself to be a shy person? If "No," was there ever a period in your life during which you considered yourself to be a shy person?⁷² The results of these two questions were quite surprising. Over 40% reported that they considered themselves to be shy at the time. Over 80% reported being shy at some point in their lives. Another, more revealing measure of shyness, was created by James C. McCroskey and Virginia Richmond and is available on his website (<http://www.jamescmccroskey.com/measures/shyness.htm>).⁷³ Before going further in this chapter, take a minute and complete the shyness scale.

According to Arnold Buss, shyness involves discomfort when an individual is interacting with another person(s) in a social situation.⁷⁴ Buss further clarifies the concept by differentiating between anxious shyness and self-conscious shyness. **Anxious shyness** involves the fear associated with dealing with others face-to-face. Anxious shyness is initially caused by a combination of strangers, novel settings, novel social roles, fear of evaluation, or fear of self-presentation. However, long-term anxious shyness is caused by chronic fear, low sociability, low self-esteem, loneliness, and avoidance conditioning. **Self-conscious shyness**, on the other hand, involves feeling conspicuous or socially exposed when dealing with others face-to-face. Self-conscious shyness is initially caused by feelings of conspicuousness, breaches of one's privacy, teasing/ridicule/bullying, overpraise, or one's foolish actions. However, long-term self-conscious shyness can be a result of socialization, public self-consciousness, history of teasing/ridicule/bullying, low self-esteem, negative appearance, and poor social skills.

Whether one suffers from anxious or self-conscious shyness, the general outcome is a detriment to an individual's interpersonal interactions with others. Shy individuals often have limited opportunities to engage in interpersonal interactions with others, so their communicative skills may not be as well-developed as those of their less-shy counterparts. This lack of skill practice places a shy individual in a never-ending spiral, where they always feel just outside the crowd.

Communication Apprehension

James C. McCroskey started examining the notion of anxiety in communicative situations during the late 1960s. Since that time, research on communication apprehension has been one of the most commonly studied variables in the field. McCroskey defined **communication apprehension** as the fear or anxiety “associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons.”⁷⁵ Although many measures have been created over the years examining communication apprehension, the most prominent one has been James C. McCroskey’s Personal Report of Communication Apprehension-24 (PRCA-24).⁷⁶ If you have not done so already, please stop reading and complete the PRCA-24 before going further (<http://www.jamescmcroskey.com/measures/prca24.htm>).

The PRCA-24 evaluates four distinct types of communication apprehension (CA): interpersonal CA, group CA, meeting CA, and public CA. Interpersonal CA is the one most important to us within this textbook because it examines the extent to which individuals experience fear or anxiety when thinking about or actually interacting with another person (For more on the topic of CA as a general area of study, read Richmond, Wrench, and McCroskey’s book, *Communication Apprehension, Avoidance, and Effectiveness*).⁷⁷ Interpersonal CA impacts people’s relationship development almost immediately. In one experimental study, researchers paired people and had them converse for 15 minutes. At the end of the 15-minute conversation, the researchers had both parties rate the other individual. The results indicated that high-CAs (highly communicative apprehensive people) were perceived as less attractive, less trustworthy, and less satisfied than low-CAs (people with low levels of communication apprehension).⁷⁸ High-CAs don’t fare well in most of the research in interpersonal communication. Instead of delving into too much detail now, we will periodically revisit CA as we explore various topics throughout this book.

Research Spotlight



In 2020, Jason Wrench, Narissra, Punyanunt-Carter, and Adolfo Garcia examined the relationships between mindfulness and religious communication.⁷⁹ For our purposes, the researchers examined an individual’s religious CA, or the degree to which people were anxious about communicating with another person about their held religious beliefs. In this study, mindful describing and nonreactivity to inner experience were found to be negatively related to religious CA. As the authors note, “mindfulness can help people develop more confidence to communicate their ideas and opinions about religion. Therefore, people would be less apprehensive about communicating about religion” (p. 13).

Willingness to Communicate

The final of our approach and avoidance traits is the willingness to communicate (WTC). James McCroskey and Virginia Richmond originally coined the WTC concept as an individual's predisposition to initiate communication with others.⁸⁰ **Willingness to communicate** examines an individual's tendency to initiate communicative interactions with other people. Take a minute and complete the WTC scale available from James C. McCroskey's website (<http://www.jamescmc-croskey.com/measures/WTC.htm>).

Individuals with high WTC levels are more likely to initiate interpersonal interactions than those with low WTC levels. However, just because someone is not likely to initiate conversations doesn't mean that he or she is unable to actively and successfully engage in interpersonal interactions. For this reason, we refer to WTC as an approach trait because it describes an individual's likelihood of approaching interactions with other people. As noted by Richmond et al., "People with a high WTC attempt to communicate more often and work harder to make that communication effective than people with a low WTC, who make far fewer attempts and often aren't as effective at communicating."⁸¹

Argumentativeness/Verbal Aggressiveness

Starting in the mid-1980s, Dominic Infante and Charles Wigley defined **verbal aggression** as "the tendency to attack the self-concept of individuals instead of, or besides, their positions on topics of communication."⁸² Notice that this definition specifically is focused on the attacking of someone's self-concept or an individual's attitudes, opinions, and cognitions about one's competence, character, strengths, and weaknesses. For example, if someone perceives themselves as a good worker, then a verbally aggressive attack would demean that person's quality of work or their ability to do future quality work. In a study conducted by Terry Kinney, he found that self-concept attacks happen on three basic fronts: group membership (e.g., "Your whole division is a bunch of idiots!"), personal failings (e.g., "No wonder you keep getting passed up for a promotion!"), and relational failings (e.g., "No wonder your spouse left you!").⁸³

Now that we've discussed what verbal aggression is, we should distinguish it from another closely related term, argumentativeness. According to Dominic Infante and Andrew Rancer, **argumentativeness** is a communication trait that "predisposes the individual in communication situations to advocate positions on controversial issues, and to attacking verbally the positions which other people take on these issues."⁸⁴ You'll notice that argumentativeness occurs when an individual attacks another's positions on various issues; whereas, verbal aggression occurs when an individual attacks someone's self-concept instead of attacking another's positions. Argumentativeness is viewed as a constructive communication trait, whereas verbal aggression is considered a destructive communication trait.

Individuals who are highly verbally aggressive are not liked by those around them.⁸⁵ Researchers have seen this pattern of results across different relationship types. Highly verbally aggressive individuals justify their verbal aggression in interpersonal relationships regardless of the relational stage (new vs. long-term relationship).⁸⁶ In an interesting study conducted by Beth Semic and Daniel

Canary, the two set out to watch interpersonal interactions and the arguments formed during those interactions based on individuals' verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness.⁸⁷ The researchers had friendship dyads come into the lab and asked them to discuss two different topics. The researchers found that highly argumentative individuals did not differ in the number of arguments they made compared to their low-argumentative counterparts. However, highly verbally aggressive individuals provided far fewer arguments when compared to their less verbally aggressive counterparts. Although this study did not find that highly argumentative people provided more (or better) arguments, highly verbally aggressive people provided fewer actual arguments when they disagreed with another person. Overall, verbal aggression and argumentativeness have been shown to impact several interpersonal relationships, so we will periodically revisit these concepts throughout the book.

Sociocommunicative Orientation

In the mid-to-late 1970s, Sandra Bem began examining psychological gender orientation.⁸⁸ In her theorizing of psychological gender, Bem measured two constructs, masculinity and femininity, using a scale she created called the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI—<http://garote.bdmoneys.net/bsri.html>). Her measure evaluated an individual's femininity or masculinity. Bem defined masculinity as individuals exhibiting perceptions and traits typically associated with males, and femininity as individuals exhibiting perceptions and traits usually associated with females. Individuals who adhered to both their biological sex and their corresponding psychological gender (masculine males, feminine females) were considered sex-typed. Individuals who differed between their biological sex and their corresponding psychological gender (feminine males, masculine females) were labeled cross-sex typed. Lastly, some individuals exhibited both feminine and masculine traits, and these individuals were referred to as androgynous.

Virginia Richmond and James McCroskey opted to discard the biological sex-biased language of “masculine” and “feminine” for the more neutral language of “assertiveness” and “responsiveness.”⁸⁹ The combination of assertiveness and responsiveness was called someone's **sociocommunicative orientation**, which emphasizes that Bem's notions of gender are truly representative of communicator traits and not one's biological sex. Before talking about the two factors of sociocommunicative orientation, please take a few minutes to complete the Sociocommunicative Orientation Scale (<http://www.jamescmccroskey.com/measures/sco.htm>).⁹⁰

Responsiveness

Responsiveness refers to an individual who “considers other's feelings, listens to what others have to say, and recognizes the needs of others.”⁹¹ If you filled out the Sociocommunicative Orientation Scale, you would find that the words associated with responsiveness include the following: helpful, responsive to others, sympathetic, compassionate, sensitive to the needs of others, sincere, gentle, warm, tender, and friendly.

Assertiveness

Assertiveness refers to individuals who “can initiate, maintain, and terminate conversations, according to their interpersonal goals.”⁹² If you filled out the Sociocommunicative Orientation Scale, you would find that the words associated with assertiveness include the following: defends own beliefs, independent, forceful, has a strong personality, assertive, dominant, willing to take a stand, acts as a leader, aggressive, and competitive.

Versatility

Communication always exists within specific contexts, so selecting a single best style to communicate in every context is not feasible because not all patterns of communication are appropriate or effective in all situations. As such, McCroskey and Richmond added a third dimension to the mix that they called **versatility**.⁹³ Individuals who are competent communicators know when it is both appropriate and effective to use both responsiveness and assertiveness. Pairing the two terms against each other made little sense to McCroskey and Richmond because both were so important. Other terms scholars have associated with versatility include “adaptability, flexibility, rhetorical sensitivity, and style flexing.”⁹⁴ The opposite of versatility was also noted by McCroskey and Richmond, who saw such terms as dogmatic, rigid, uncompromising, and unyielding as demonstrating the lack of versatility.

Sociocommunicative Orientation and Interpersonal Communication

Sociocommunicative orientation has been examined in several studies that relate to interpersonal communication. In a study conducted by Brian Patterson and Shawn Beckett, the researchers sought to see the importance of sociocommunicative orientation and how people repair relationships.⁹⁵ Highly assertive individuals were found to take control of repair situations. Highly responsive individuals differed in their approaches to relational repair, depending on whether the target was perceived as assertive or responsive. When a target was perceived as highly assertive, the responsive individual let the assertive person take control of the relational repair process. When a target was perceived as highly responsive, the responsive individual was more likely to encourage the other person to self-disclose and took on the role of the listener. As a whole, highly assertive individuals were more likely to emphasize the optimistic aspects of the relationship. In contrast, highly responsive individuals were more likely to take on the role of a listener during the relational repair. Later in this book, we will revisit several interpersonal communication contexts where sociocommunicative orientation has been researched.

Relational Dispositions

The final three dimensions proposed by John Daly were relational dispositions.⁹⁶ **Relational dispositions** are general patterns of mental processes that impact how people view and organize themselves in relationships. For our purposes, we’ll examine two unique relational dispositions: attachment and rejection sensitivity.

Attachment

In a set of three different volumes, John Bowlby theorized that humans were born with a set of inherent behaviors designed to allow proximity with supportive others.^{97,98,99} These behaviors were called attachment behaviors, and the supportive others were called attachment figures. Inherent in Bowlby's model of attachment is that humans have a biological drive to attach themselves to others. For example, a baby's crying and searching help the baby find their attachment figure (typically a parent/guardian) who can provide care, protection, and support. Infants (and adults) view attachment as an issue of whether an attachment figure is nearby, accessible, and attentive. Bowlby believed that these interpersonal models, which are developed in infancy through thousands of interactions with an attachment figure, would influence an individual's interpersonal relationships throughout their entire lifespan. According to Bowlby, the basic internal working model of affection consists of three components.¹⁰⁰ Infants who bond with their attachment figure during the first two years develop a model that people are trustworthy, develop a model that informs the infant that he or she is valuable, and develop a model that informs the infant that he or she is effective during interpersonal interactions. As you can easily see, not developing this model during infancy leads to several problems.

If there is a breakdown in an individual's relationship with their attachment figure (primarily one's mother), then the infant would suffer long-term negative consequences. Bowlby called his ideas on the importance of mother-child attachment and the lack thereof as the **Maternal Deprivation Hypothesis**. Bowlby hypothesized that maternal deprivation occurred because of separation from or loss of one's mother or a mother's inability to develop an attachment with her infant. This attachment is crucial during the first two years of a child's life. Bowlby predicted that children who were deprived of attachment (or had a sporadic attachment) would later exhibit delinquency, reduced intelligence, increased aggression, depression, and **affectionless psychopathy**—the inability to show affection or care about others.

In 1991, Kim Bartholomew and Leonard Horowitz expanded on Bowlby's work, developing a scheme for understanding adult attachment.¹⁰¹ In this study, Bartholomew and Horowitz proposed a model for understanding adult attachment. On one end of the spectrum, you have an individual's abstract image of themselves as being either worthy of love and support or not. On the other end of the spectrum, you have an individual's perception of whether another person will be trustworthy/available or another person is unreliable and rejecting. When you combine these dichotomies, you end up with four distinct attachment styles (as seen in Figure 3.11).

The first attachment style is labeled "**secure**," because these individuals believe they are lovable and expect that others will behave in accepting and responsive ways within interpersonal interactions. Not surprisingly, individuals who are secure show the most satisfaction, commitment, and trust in their relationships. The second attachment style, **preoccupied**, occurs when someone does not perceive themselves as worthy of love but sees people as trustworthy and available for interpersonal relationships. These individuals would attempt to get others to accept them. The third attachment style, **fearful** (sometimes referred to as fearful avoidants),¹⁰² represents individuals who see themselves as unworthy of love and believe that others will react negatively through either deception or rejection. These individuals avoid interpersonal relationships to avoid being rejected by others.

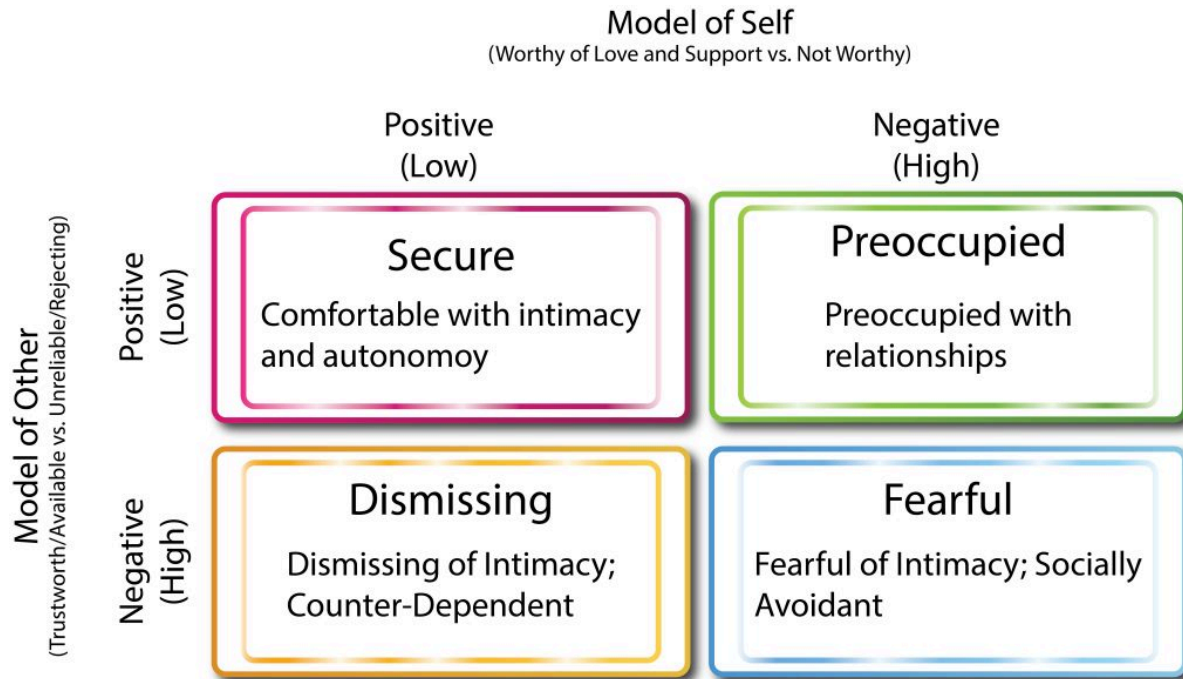


Figure 3.11 Attachment Styles

Even in communication, fearful people may avoid it because they believe others will not provide helpful information or that others will simply reject their attempts at communication. The final attachment style, **dismissing**, reflects those individuals who see themselves as worthy of love but believe that others will be deceptive and reject them in interpersonal relationships. These individuals avoid interpersonal relationships to protect themselves against the disappointment that can occur when placing too much trust in another person or making themselves vulnerable to rejection.

Rejection Sensitivity

Although no one likes to be rejected by others in interpersonal interactions, most of us differ from one another in how this rejection affects us as humans. We've all had our relational approaches (either by potential friends or dating partners) rejected at some point and know that it kind of sucks to be rejected. The idea that people differ in terms of their sensitivity to rejection was first discussed in the 1930s by the German psychoanalyst Karen Horney.¹⁰³ **Rejection sensitivity** can be defined as the degree to which an individual expects to be rejected, readily perceives rejection when it occurs, and experiences an intensely adverse reaction to that rejection.

First, people who are highly sensitive to rejection expect that others will reject them. This expectation of rejection is based on a multitude of previous experiences in which the individual has faced genuine rejection. Hence, they assume that others will reject them.

Second, people highly sensitive to rejection are more adept at noting when they are being rejected; however, it's not uncommon for these individuals to see rejection when it does not exist. Horney explains perceptions of rejection in this fashion:

It is difficult to describe the degree of their sensitivity to rejection. Change in an appointment, having to wait, failure to receive an immediate response, disagreement with their opinions, any noncompliance with their wishes, in short, any failure to fulfill their demands on their terms, is felt as a rebuff. And a rebuff not only throws them back on their basic anxiety, but it is also considered equivalent to humiliation.¹⁰⁴

As we can see from this brief description by Horney, rejection sensitivity can arise from even the slightest perceptions of being rejected.

Last, individuals who are highly sensitive to rejection react negatively when they perceive themselves as being rejected. This negative reaction can range from simply not engaging in future interactions to physical or verbal aggression. The link between the rejection and the negative reaction may not even be completely understandable to the individual. Horney explains, “More often the connection between feeling rebuffed and feeling irritated remains unconscious. This happens all the more easily since the rebuff may have been so slight as to escape conscious awareness. Then a person will feel irritable, or become spiteful and vindictive or feel fatigued or depressed or have a headache, without the remotest suspicion why.”¹⁰⁵ Ultimately, individuals with high sensitivity to rejection can develop a “why bother” approach to initiating new relationships with others. This fear of rejection eventually becomes a self-induced handicap that prevents these individuals from receiving the affection they desire.

As with most psychological phenomena, this process typically proceeds through a series of stages. Horney explains that individuals suffering from rejection sensitivity tend to undergo an eight-step cycle:

1. Fear of being rejected.
2. Excessive need for affection (e.g., demands for exclusive and unconditional love).
3. When the need is not met, they feel rejected.
4. The individual reacts negatively (e.g., with hostility) to the rejection.
5. Repressed hostility for fear of losing the affection.
6. Unexpressed rage builds up inside.
7. Increased fear of rejection.
8. Increased need for relational reassurance from a partner.

Of course, as an individual’s need for relational reassurance increases, so does their fear of being rejected, and the perception of rejection spirals out of control.

As you may have guessed, there is a strong connection between John Bowlby’s attachment theory^{106,107,108} and Karen Horney’s theory of rejection sensitivity. Rejection sensitivity has several implications for interpersonal communication. In a study conducted by Geraldine Downey, Antonio Freitas, Benjamin Michaelis, and Hala Khouri, the researchers wanted to track high versus low rejection-sensitive individuals in relationships and how long those relationships lasted.¹⁰⁹ The researchers also had the participants complete the Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire created by Geraldine Downey and Scott Feldman.¹¹⁰ The study started by having couples keep diaries for four weeks, which helped the researchers develop a baseline perception of an individual’s sensitivity to rejection during the conflict. After the initial four-week period, the researchers revisited the partic-

ipants one year later to assess their progress. Not surprisingly, high rejection-sensitive individuals were more likely to break up during the study than their low rejection-sensitivity counterparts.

Key Takeaways

- Communication dispositions describe broad tendencies in how people engage with others, including introversion/extraversion, approach/avoidance behaviors, and how assertive or responsive they are in interactions.
- Shyness, communication apprehension, and willingness to communicate reflect different ways people approach or avoid interpersonal communication; each trait influences one's comfort, skill development, and frequency of interaction.
- Argumentativeness involves challenging ideas constructively, while verbal aggressiveness targets a person's self-concept and damages relationships.
- Sociocommunicative orientation encompasses assertiveness and responsiveness, and individuals who strike a balance between the two—demonstrating versatility—tend to be more competent communicators across various contexts.
- Relational dispositions, such as attachment style and rejection sensitivity, influence how people form, maintain, or withdraw from relationships; individuals with a secure attachment style or low rejection sensitivity experience healthier interpersonal dynamics.

Exercises

1. Fill out the various measures discussed in this section related to communication. After completing these measures, how can your communication traits help explain your interpersonal relationships with others?
2. Watch a segment of a political debate on YouTube. Would you characterize debates as argumentative, verbally aggressive, or something else entirely? Why?
3. John Bowlby's attachment theory and Karen Horney's theory of rejection sensitivity have theoretical overlaps. Do you think that an individual's early attachment can lead to higher levels of rejection sensitivity? Why or why not?

Key Terms

affectionless psychopathy

affective orientation

anxious shyness	Maternal Deprivation Hypothesis
argumentativeness	narcissism
assertiveness	personality
authoritarianism	preoccupied attachment
cognitive dispositions	rejection sensitivity
communication apprehension	relational dispositions
communication dispositions	responsiveness
dismissing attachment	right-wing authoritarians
depression	secure attachment
dogmatism	self-concept
emotional intelligence	self-conscious shyness
emotional loneliness	self-esteem
empathy	self-image
extraversion	self-monitoring
external locus of control	self-worth
fearful attachment	shyness
ideal-self	social loneliness
intrapersonal	social-personal dispositions
intrapersonal communication	sociocommunicative orientation
internal locus of control	temperament
introversion	verbal aggression
locus of control	versatility
loneliness	willingness to communicate
Machiavellianism	

Chapter Wrap-Up

Besides your personality, your biologically based temperament also plays an important role in how you interact with others interpersonally. As discussed in this chapter, your temperament is identifiable at birth, whereas, your personality is something that develops over your lifespan. Although we

cannot change the biological aspects of our temperament, we can learn how to adjust our behaviors in light of our temperaments.

Chapter Exercises

Real-World Case Study

John's mother, Kathleen, was 16 years old when he was born. Kathleen's mother had died during her childbirth because she had refused to get cancer treatments, which could have harmed her unborn child. After Kathleen's birth and her mother's death, Kathleen's father was always cold toward his daughter and often blamed her for his wife's death.

When Kathleen entered her teenage years, she started acting out and started participating in several risky behaviors, which is how she ended up pregnant at 16. After John's birth, Kathleen was ill-equipped to handle a child, let alone attempt to bond with a child. During John's first two years of life, he was often dropped off at Kathleen's friends' houses or even her grandmother's house, and then Kathleen would disappear for days. After two years of attempting to raise John, Kathleen's grandmother convinced her to put her child up for adoption.

When John was two, he was adopted by Bobby and Priscilla Wright. The couple already had one child, Mikey, and they desperately wanted another child. Still, Priscilla could not have more children, so the addition of John to their family was very welcome. Although Bobby and Priscilla were amazing parents, John always felt somewhat disconnected.

In school, John rarely kept the same friends as he progressed through his education. He found it easy to leave one set of friends behind and create a new set wherever he went. He often found it odd when people remained friends with those they'd known since birth. This same pattern of behavior continued into adulthood, and John quickly found himself with a small circle of friends. Honestly, he was horrible at keeping up with his friends. It's not that he didn't like his friends, but he felt friends needed to fit into his schedule. As time passed, he quickly found himself with more acquaintances and fewer close relationships. Even his relationship with his family seemed remote and nonessential. He loved his family, but they were almost out of sight and out of mind since they lived on the other side of the country.

When John turned 40, he began trying to figure out why his social and relationship life was in such disarray. He wanted to have relationships with other people but didn't know how.

1. Based on the information in the case, how would you characterize John in this story?
2. Apply John Bowlby's theory of attachment to this story.
3. Apply Karen Horney's theory of rejection sensitivity to this story.

End-of-Chapter Assessment

1. Which of the following is NOT one of Charles Horton Cooley's postulates related to the "looking-glass self?"

- a. Actors learn about themselves in every situation by exercising their imagination to reflect on their social performance.
 - b. Actors next imagine what those others must think of them.
 - c. Actors assess those perceptions through prior interactions with others.
 - d. Actors experience an affective reaction to the imagined evaluation of the other.
2. Which of the following is the truest statement about the relationship between communication and self-esteem?
 - a. There is no relationship between communication and self-esteem.
 - b. One's self-esteem impacts how they communicate.
 - c. One's communication impacts an individual's self-esteem.
 - d. There is a circular relationship between self-esteem and communication.
3. Which of John Daly's personality dispositions refers to general patterns of mental processes that impact how people socially relate to others or view themselves?
 - a. Cognitive
 - b. Communicative
 - c. Relational
 - d. Personal-social
4. Jerry is highly in-tune with his emotions. He generally believes that whatever his feelings are telling him to do, it's probably the right thing for him to do. What personality trait is Jerry exhibiting?
 - a. Cognitive complexity
 - b. Affective orientation
 - c. Emotional intelligence
 - d. Shyness
5. Which of Kim Bartholomew and Leonard Horowitz's attachment styles describes individuals who see themselves as unworthy of love and generally believe that others will react negatively through either deception or rejection?
 - a. Alienated
 - b. Dismissing
 - c. Fearful
 - d. Secure

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Chapter 4: Verbal Elements of Communication



“Balloons, Abstract, Communication” by [Gerd Altmann](#) from [Pixabay](#)

Have you ever said something that someone else misinterpreted as something else? Some of the most common problems in interpersonal communication stem from the use of language. For instance, two students, Kelly and James, are texting each other. Kelly texts James about meeting for dinner, and James texts “K” instead of “okay.” Kelly is worried because she thinks James is mad because he used a capital letter. She wonders why he texted “K” instead of “k,” “ok,” “yes,” or “okay.” James was in a hurry, so he just texted in caps because he was excited to see Kelly. He was trying to let her know that he was definitely looking forward to dinner with her.

This example provides insight into how language can shape our perceptions. Kelly and James had two different perceptions of the same event. One person was worried, and the other person was excited. Chapter 4 examines verbal communication because we know words are powerful. The words we use can impact how others perceive us and how we perceive them.

Language is a system of human communication using a particular form of spoken or written words or other symbols. Language consists of the use of words in a structured way. Language helps us understand others' wants, needs, and desires. Language can help create connections, but it can also pull us apart. Language is so vital to communication. Imagine if you never learned a language; how would you be able to function? Without language, how could you develop meaningful connections with others? Language allows us to express ourselves and achieve our goals.

Language is the most important element in human communication. Language is made up of words, which are arbitrary symbols. In this chapter, we will explore the principles of language, its functions, and strategies for enhancing verbal communication.

How Words Work

Learning Objectives

1. Identify and describe the rules that govern how words function (semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic).
2. Determine the level of abstraction in verbal messages using the abstraction ladder.
3. Explain how language influences perception and constructs reality.
4. Distinguish between the denotative and connotative meanings of words.
5. Recognize metamessages and describe how they impact communication.

One person might refer to a shopping cart as a buggy, while another might call it a cart. There are several ways to say you would like a beverage, such as, “liquid refresher,” “soda,” “Coke,” “pop,” “refreshment,” or “drink.” A pacifier for a baby is sometimes called a “paci,” “binkie,” “sookie,” or “mute button.” Linguist Robin Tolmach Lakoff asks, “How can something that is physically just puffs of air, a mere stand-in for reality, have the power to change us and our world?”¹ This example illustrates that meanings are in people, and words don't necessarily represent what they mean.

Words and Meaning

Words can have different rules to help us understand their meaning. There are three rules: semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic.²

Semantic Rules

First, semantic rules are defined by the dictionary's 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 could not communicate with others if we did not have semantic rules.

A poignant example of this is a story about a third-grade teacher who inquired about a period. One male student in her class went on and on about how girls have monthly periods, but he did not realize that the teacher meant the use of periods for punctuation at the end of a sentence. Hence, understanding semantic rules is crucial to avoid embarrassment or misunderstandings.

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 express 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 “Happens to every guy sometimes this does.” This example illustrates that syntactic rules can vary based on culture or background.

Another example is Figure 4.1. Here, we learn the importance that a comma can make in written language. In the first instance, “Let’s eat grandma!” is quite different from the second one, “Let’s eat, grandma!” The first implies cannibalism and the second a family dinner. As the image says, punctuation saves lives.

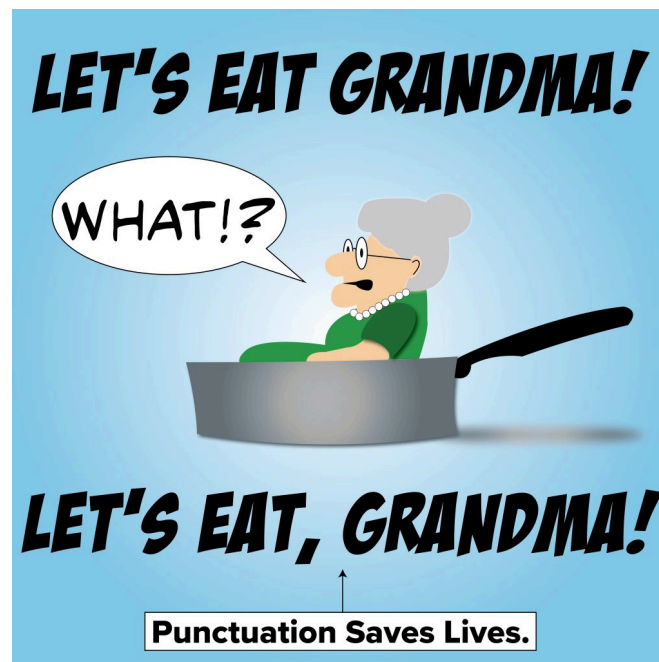


Figure 4.1 Commas Matter

Pragmatic Rules

Third, pragmatic rules help us interpret messages by analyzing the interaction in its entirety. 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 lover. One could be a positive connotation, and another might be a negative one. The same holds for humor. Suppose we know that the other person understands and appreciates sarcasm. In that case, we might be more likely to engage in that behavior and perceive it differently from someone who takes every word literally. The meaning we share usually goes beyond the words that are said. For example, we may say “I’m cold” to convey “I need a blanket.”³ I’m cold is an efficient way of conveying that an individual needs a blanket demonstrating that efficiency of communication often drives how we communicate. Another factor driving pragmatic rules and their persistence across generations is the ability to learn the rules. For example, one of the authors was a teenager in the ’80s. “Gnarly”, “totally tubular” and “gag me with a spoon” were efficient forms of communication, but not easy to learn across generations and thus these phrase have not lasted.

Most pragmatic rules are based on culture and experience. For instance, the term “Netflix and chill” often refers to a situation where two people plan to have a romantic encounter. 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 relax. Another example is “Want to have a drink?”, which typically implies an alcoholic beverage. Another way of saying this might be, “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 were 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.

Words Create Reality

Language helps to create reality. Often, humans label their experiences. For instance, the word “success” has different interpretations depending on your perceptions. Success to you might be a certain type of car or a certain amount of income. However, for someone else, success might be the freedom to do what they love or to travel to exotic places. Success may mean something different depending on your background or culture.

Another example might be the word “intimacy.” Intimacy to one person may be similar to love, but to another person, it may be the psychological connection that you feel with them. Words can significantly impact a person’s reality, influencing what they believe and feel.

If a child complains that they don’t feel loved, but their parents/guardians argue that they continuously show affection by giving hugs and engaging in fun shared activities, who would you believe? The child might say that they never heard their parents/guardians say the word love, and hence, they don’t feel love. So, when we argue that words can create a person’s reality, that is what we mean.

Specific words can make a difference in how a person will receive the message. That is why certain rhetoricians and politicians will spend hours looking for the right word to capture the true essence of a message. A personal trainer might be careful to use the word “overweight” as opposed to “fat,” because it just sounds drastically different. At Disney World, they call their employees “cast members” rather than workers, because it gives the perception that each person has a part in helping to run the show. Even on a resume, you might select words that set you apart from the other applicants. For instance, if you were a cook, you might say “culinary artist.” It gives the impression that you weren’t just cooking food; you were making masterpieces with food. Words matter, and how they are used will make a difference.

Words Reflect Attitudes

When we first fall in love with someone, we use positive adjectives to describe that person. However, if you have fallen out of love with that person, you might use negative or neutral words to describe that same person. Words can reflect attitudes. Some people can label one experience as pleasant, and another person can have the opposite experience. This difference is because words reflect our attitudes about things. If a person has positive emotions toward another, they might describe that person as funny, mature, and thrifty. However, if the person has negative feelings or attitudes toward that same person, they might describe them as childish, old, and cheap. These words can give a connotation of how the person perceives them.

Level of Abstraction

When we think of language, it can be pretty **abstract**. For example, when we say something is “interesting,” it can be positive or negative. That is what we mean when we say that language is abstract. Language can be very specific. You can tell someone particular things to help them better understand what you are trying to say by using specific and concrete examples. For instance, if you say, “You are a jerk!” the person who receives that message might become pretty angry and wonder why you made that statement. To be clear, it might be better to say something like, “When you slammed that door in my face this morning, it really upset me, and I didn’t think that behavior was appropriate.” The second statement is more descriptive.

In 1941, linguist S.I. Hayakawa created what is called the **abstraction ladder** (Figure 4.2).⁴ The abstraction ladder starts abstract at the top, while the bottom rung is very concrete. In Figure 4.2, we’ve shown how you can progress from abstract ideas (e.g., information) through various levels of increasingly concrete ideas to the most concrete idea (e.g., interpersonal communication). Ideally, you can see that as we move down the ladder, the topic becomes more fine-tuned and concrete.

In our daily lives, we often employ high levels of abstraction. For instance, growing up, your parents/guardians probably helped you with homework, cleaning, cooking, and transporting you from one event to another. Yet, we rarely say thank you to everything; we might make a general comment, such as a simple “thank you,” rather than saying, “Thank you so much for helping me with my math homework and helping me figure out how to solve for the volume of spheres.” It takes too long to

say that, so people tend to be abstract. However, abstraction can cause problems if you don't provide enough description.

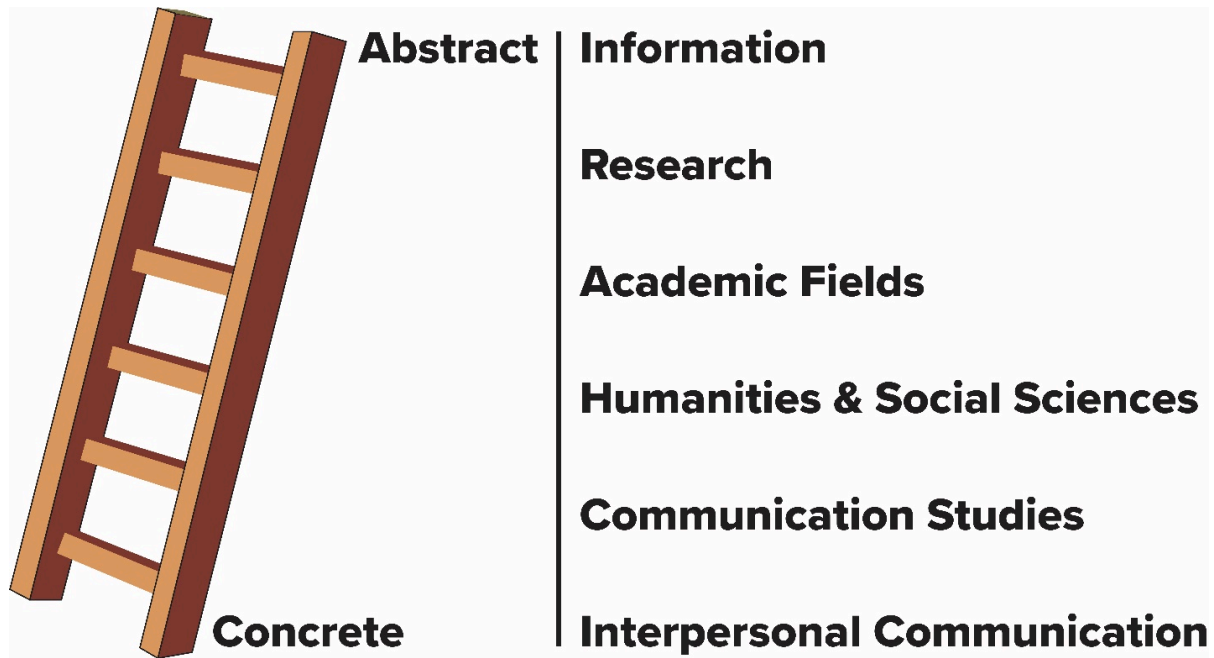


Figure 4.2 Abstraction Ladder

Concrete Messages Increase Perceived Opioid Use Risk

Researchers test the use of concrete vs abstract messages to determine whether concrete messages increase the perceived risk of opioid use.⁵

- When people were exposed to concrete language about the negative consequences of opioid use they had more concrete thoughts about the negative consequences.
- When people thought more concretely it increased risk perception and increased negative emotions leading to an increased perception of risk when using opioids.

Metamessages

Metacommunication is known as communication about communication.⁶ Yet, **metamessages** are relationship messages that are sent among people who they communicate. These messages can be verbal, nonverbal, direct, or indirect. For instance, if you see two friends just talking about what they did last weekend, they are also sending metamessages as they talk. Metamessages can convey affection, appreciation, disgust, ridicule, scorn, or contempt. Every time you send messages to oth-

ers, notice the metamessages that they might be sending you. Do they seem upset or annoyed with certain things that you say? In this book, we emphasize the importance of mindfulness when speaking. You may not realize what metamessages you are sending out to others.



Figure 4.3 Perception is Key

Words and Meanings

Words can have denotative meanings or connotative meanings. In this section, we will learn about the differences and the triangle of meaning.⁷ Researchers by the names of Ogden and Richards noticed that misunderstandings occur when people associate different meanings with the same message. Their model (Figure 4.4) illustrates that there is an indirect association between a word and the actual referent or thing it represents.

As you can see, when you hear the word “dog,” it conjures up meanings for different people. The word “dog” itself is a symbol and signifier, or sound elements or other linguistic symbols that represent an underlying concept or meaning. When we hear the word “dog,” it is what we call the “signified,” or the meaning or idea expressed when someone hears the word. Here, maybe you have a dog, and you really see that dog as your best friend, or, as in my case, you call him your little “cuddle monster” because he always wants to be connected to you. Again, our meaning attached to the symbol remains separate from the physical entity itself. In this case, there is a real dog named Teddy, who is the referent, or the physical thing that a word or phrase denotes or stands for.

Words can have a **denotative** meaning, which is the dictionary definition. These are words that most people are familiar with, and they can all agree on the understanding of the word. If you asked a person what a car or a phone is, they would most likely know what you are talking about when you use those words.

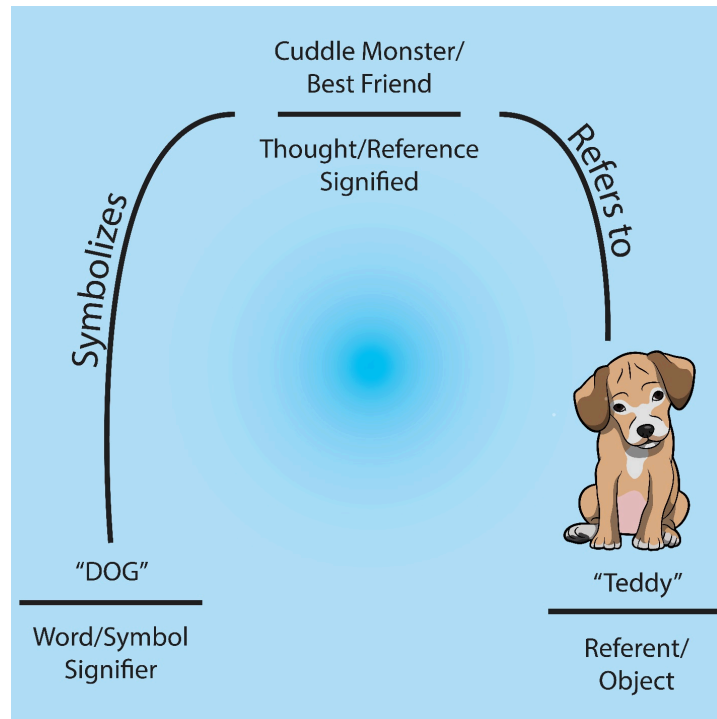


Figure 4.4 Signifier, Signified, and Referent

Words can have a **connotative** meaning, which is a subjective definition of the word. The word might mean something different from what you meant. For example, you may hear someone referring to their baby. You can fairly safely assume that the person is referring to their infant, but they could just as easily refer to a significant other.

Key Takeaways

- Words follow semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic rules that help us understand meaning in context. These rules govern how words are defined (semantic), structured (syntactic), and interpreted in real-life interactions (pragmatic).
- Language varies in levels of abstraction. Using the abstraction ladder, we can identify whether language is general or specific. Clear, concise language reduces misunderstandings.
- Language influences how we perceive and define reality. The words we choose shape how we experience the world and communicate our values and beliefs.
- Words carry both denotative and connotative meanings. The denotative meaning is the literal, dictionary definition, while the connotative meaning reflects personal, emotional, or cultural associations.
- Metamessages are implicit messages embedded in communication, conveying layered meanings—verbal or nonverbal—that reveal attitudes, emotions, or relationship

dynamics, often beyond the surface level.

Exercises

1. Create an example of an abstraction ladder of how communication can range from general to very specific.
2. If a friend decides to call themselves an “extremist” because they love their children extremely, are extremely passionate about music and piano and their community, consider whether there are any concerns or challenges with labeling one’s self an extremist. What would be the concerns or challenges and what qualities of language create these concerns or challenges?
3. Denotative and Connotative Ability. In groups, find ten random words from the dictionary and ask everyone to write at least five connotations of each of the words. Then, compare your lists. Discuss the similarities and differences in your word choices.
4. Create a metamessages love board. As a class, make a list of all the ways you could tell someone you love them. Then, discuss how your metamessages might cause some misunderstandings or confusion.

Functions of Language

Learning Objectives

1. Distinguish the differences between instrumental and regulatory functions.
2. Appreciate the interactional and imaginative functions of language.
3. Examine the personal, ritual, and cultural functions of language.

Based on research examining how children learn language, it was found that children are trying to create “meaning potential.”⁸ Children learn language so they can understand and be understood by others. As children age, language serves different functions.

Instrumental and Regulatory Functions

Children typically communicate in a manner that allows parents/guardians to understand their wants and needs. When children are born, parents/guardians have to figure out if the child is hun-

gry, thirsty, dirty, or sick. Later, when the child acquires language, they can let their parent/guardian know what they want by using simple words like “eat” or “drink.”

Instrumental functions use language to fulfill a need. In [Chapter 2](#), we learned about Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. To meet our needs, we need to use language that others understand.

Language can help us define what we can or cannot do. Often, you might see campaigns that say, “Don’t drink and drive” or “Don’t text and drive” to help control behavior while driving.

Regulatory functions of language are to influence the behavior of others through requests, rules, or persuasion. These functions do not necessarily coincide with our needs. These might be advertisements that tell us to eat healthier or exercise more using specific products.

Interactional and Imaginative Functions

Interactional functions of language are used to help maintain or develop the relationship. Interactional functions also help to ease the interaction. Examples might include “Thank you,” “Please,” or “I care about you.”

Imaginative functions of language enable the creation of imaginary constructs and the telling of stories. This use of fantasy usually occurs in play or leisure activities. People who roleplay in video games will sometimes engage in imaginative functions to help their character be more effective and persuasive.

Personal Functions

Next, we have **personal functions**, which refers to the use of language to help you form your identity or sense of self. In job interviews, people are asked, “How do you describe yourself?” For some people, this is a challenging question because it showcases what makes you who you are. The words you pick, as opposed to others, can help define who you are.

Perhaps someone has told you that you’re funny. You never realized you were funny until someone told you. Because they used the word “funny” as opposed to “silly” or “crazy,” it caused you to have perceptions about yourself. This example illustrates how words serve as a personal function for us. Personal functions of language are used to express identity, feelings, and opinions.

Heuristic and Representational Functions

The **heuristic function** of language is used to learn, discover, and explore. The heuristic function could include asking several questions during a lecture or adding commentary to a child’s behavior. Another example might be “What is that tractor doing?” or “Why is the cat sleeping?”

Representational functions of language are used to request or relay information. These statements are straightforward. They do not seek an explanation. For instance, “My cat is asleep” or “The kitchen light isn’t working.”

Cultural Functions

We know a great deal about a culture based on the language that its members speak.⁹ Some words exist in other languages, but we do not have them in English. For instance, in China, there are five different words for shame, whereas in the English language, we have only one word for shame. Anthropologist Franz Boas studied the Inuit people of Baffin Island, Canada, in the late 1800s and noted that they had many words for “snow.” In fact, it’s become a myth over the years that the Inuit have 50 different words for snow. In reality, as Laura Kelly points out, there are a number of Inuit languages, so this myth is problematic because it attempts to generalize to all of them.¹⁰ Instead, the Eskimo-Aleut language tends to have long, complicated words that describe ideas; whereas, in English, we’d have a sentence to say the same thing. As such, the Eskimo-Aleut language probably has 100s of different words that can describe snow.

Analyzing the Hopi Native American language, Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf discovered that there is no difference between nouns and verbs.¹¹ To the Hopi people, their language showcases how their world and perceptions of the world are always in constant flux. The Hopi believe that everything is evolving and changing. Their conceptualization of the world is that there is continuous time. As Whorf wrote, “After a long and careful analysis the Hopi language is seen to contain no words, grammatical forms, construction or expressions that refer directly to what we call ‘time’, or to past, present or future.”¹²

A very popular theory that helps us understand how culture and language coexist is the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.¹³ Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf created this hypothesis to help us understand cultural differences in language use. The theory suggests that language impacts perceptions by showing a culture’s worldview. The hypothesis is also referred to as linguistic determinism, which posits that language influences our thoughts.

Sometimes, language has special rooted characteristics or linguistic relativity. Language can express not only our thoughts but also our feelings. Language does not only represent things, but also how we feel about things. For instance, in the United States, most houses will have backyards. In Japan, because of limited space, most houses do not have backyards; therefore, it is not represented in their language. To the Japanese, the concept of a backyard is not well understood, and they lack a specific word for it. All in all, language helps us describe our world and understand it.

Key Takeaways

- Instrumental and regulatory functions help us meet needs and influence behavior. Instrumental language fulfills basic needs (e.g., “I’m hungry”), while regulatory language is used to guide or control others (e.g., “Don’t text and drive”).
- Interactional and imaginative functions maintain relationships and enable creativity. Interactional language fosters social bonds (e.g., “Thank you”), while imaginative language enables storytelling, play, and fantasy (e.g., roleplaying in games).

- Personal, ritual, and cultural functions reflect identity, social norms, and worldviews. Language expresses self-concept (individual), marks routines and traditions (ritual), and reveals how different cultures think and live (cultural).

Exercises

1. Watch a clip of your favorite TV show and record how many statements are regulatory versus instrumental. Why do you think these differences exist? Do you think it would differ depending on the program? Why?
2. Ask several classmates to describe themselves. Then, randomly read a set of descriptions to another classmate and ask them to identify who this person is. Discover whether others view these personal characteristics or not. Determine why these differences might exist.
3. Create a list of words that exist in English but are not found in other languages. Then, create a list of words that exist in other languages but not in English. Determine why those words might not exist in English or other cultures.

The Impact of Language

Learning Objectives

1. Understand how names and naming conventions shape identity and perception.
2. Recognize how language convergence and divergence influence affiliation.
3. Identify sexist and racist language and explain its effect on communication.
4. Explain muted group theory and how dominant language patterns marginalize others.
5. Analyze how socioeconomic and cultural biases can be reflected through language.

By now, you can see that language influences how we make sense of the world. In this section, we will explore some of the ways language can influence our perceptions and potentially our behavior. To be effective communicators, we need to recognize the various ways in which language can be significant and instrumental.

Naming and Identity

New parents/guardians typically spend a great deal of time trying to pick just the right name for their newborn. We recognize that names can influence others' perceptions.¹⁴ 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 have more emotional distress than those with common names.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶

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 enables you to distinguish that person from others.

The third author of this textbook has lived with her last name "Thweatt" since 1969. How would you pronounce her last name? Growing up, both she and her brother were called Tweety by their friends, which is a really fun nickname. Dr. Thweatt is still called Tweety by one of her friends. When people ask her how to pronounce her name, she says "like the word three and eat put together – three-eat or like the W is an r – threet." An upside of her unusual name for Dr. Thweatt was that teachers remembered her, but her brother didn't care for this aspect.

Some names encompass a cultural or ethnic identity. In the popular book, *Freakonomics*, the authors showed a relationship between names and socioeconomic status.¹⁷ 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 4.5 shows some of the more popular baby names for girls and boys, along with names that are non-binary.

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 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. Couples that used similar word choices when texting each other significantly increased their relationship duration.¹⁸ This study implies that we often inadvertently mimic other people's use of language when we focus on what they say.



Figure 4.5 Popular Baby Names

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.¹⁹ However, speech can also work in the opposite direction when we **diverge**, or when we communicate very differently. 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 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."²⁰ 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 many men who work also have families and are fathers, there are no words that 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 the word choices.

Similarly, **racism** is the bias people have toward 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.²¹

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, because of the use of the phrase “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 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 connotation. 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 these types of words, it can create slight factors of sexism/racism.

Muted Group Theory

Muted group theory was initially developed to explain the way humans, specifically men and women, communicate.²² The theory claims that man-made communication is, just that, “man”-made. Similar to standpoint theory, muted group theory argues that the dominant members of society, typically men, create a language and system of communication that subverts or reduces other groups, specifically women. Muted group theory has been described as feminist theory, and even this nomenclature is a great example of the claims that the theory is making.²³ The term “feminist” exists in a male-dominated culture and language and connotes a negative conception of that which it is used to describe. Even the fact that there is not a popular term used to describe those who fight for the rights and equal status of men, points that there is a problem. The word “feminist” exists because it deviates from what is perceived as the “norm.” Even the terminology we use to describe women, and a theory that calls attention to their subversion, we see even more subversion.

Figure 4.6 represents the basic conceptualization of muted group theory. The blue circle represents the dominant group, and the solid arrow points to their perception of reality. Meanwhile, the pink circle represents the muted group, and the dashed line represents their perception of reality. Often what happens in society is that the dominant group’s perception of reality is just seen as reality. As such, the muted group’s perception of reality is seen as less than or more fanciful than the dominant group’s perception. In reality, the muted group often sees things that really exist in a society that the dominant group either cannot see or chooses not to see based on its position in society as the dominant group.

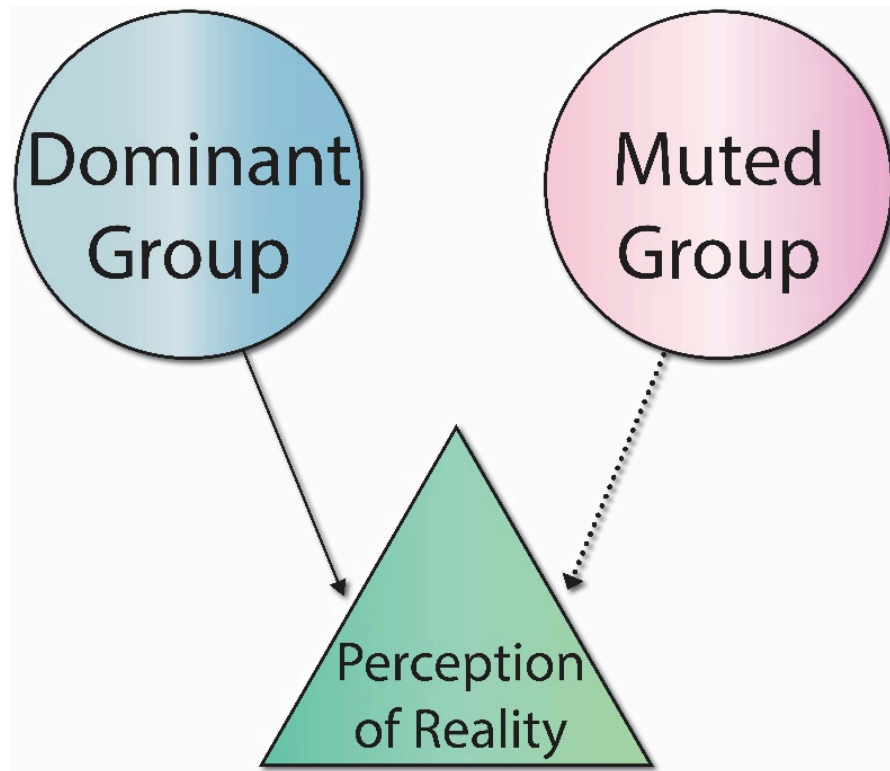


Figure 4.6 Muted Group Theory

One area in our society where we can examine muted group theory is about socioeconomic status. Here are just a few statements that wealthy people have made:

- When talking about a couple planning their wedding, “I feel sorry for them, because they have a budget.”
- “What do you mean, you don’t know if you should get them? Whenever I want new clothes, I ask my daddy for the money card.”
- The guy was looking on a website for cars, when a rich coworker asked, “Why don’t you just buy the car with cash so you don’t have to make payments?” When the guy told his coworker he couldn’t afford to pay for a car in cash, his rich coworker replied, “Why don’t you just have your parents buy it for you?”
- “If you’re making \$50,000 and your salary gets down to \$40,000 and you have to cut, it’s very severe to you. But it’s no less severe to these other people with these big numbers.”
- “People who don’t have money don’t understand the stress. Could you imagine what it’s like to say I got three kids in private school; I have to think about pulling them out? How do you do that?”
- “You don’t get the vote if you don’t pay a dollar in taxes. But what I really think is it should be like a corporation. You pay a million dollars, you get a million votes. How’s that?”

The perspectives illustrated in these statements are ones that most of us cannot easily relate to. The opposite is also true. People who live in the top 1% often have very flawed perceptions of what life is like for those who don’t have piles of money sitting around. Often, those in the dominant group (in this case, the top 1%) have no conceptualization of what life is like for those in muted groups (the bottom 99%). As such, those in muted groups often have a much clearer perception of reality.

Some research in this theory has been done on other subverted groups such as new kids at school.²⁴ They found it was normative patterns that created a system of subversion in the classroom. When a new student arrived, they inadvertently went against the popular normative habits of the class and, in doing so, ostracized themselves. Other students simultaneously asserted and solidified their dominance while lowering the status of the new student. This same thing can be seen in our male-dominated society. As women seek to make themselves known and heard, they are continually reduced, and male-centric standards are reinforced.

Research Spotlight



Heather Kissack (2010) focused on the subversion and muting of women in email communication within businesses.²⁵ She found that women are consistently marginalized and muted in organizational emails in the workplace. This is surprising because it would seem that without the nonverbal cues of face-to-face communication, there would be less muting of women in computer-mediated communication. Unfortunately, in this study, one can see that it is the

male-centric verbiage that has created this divide in social and organizational status. Even as women attempted to un-mute themselves, they were increasingly muted and subverted.

Key Takeaways

- Names affect how others perceive us and how we view ourselves, shaping identity and influencing behavior.
- Adapting language to match others (convergence) fosters affiliation, while intentionally differing (divergence) can create distance.
- Language can reinforce sexism and racism when it unnecessarily marks gender or race, even unintentionally.
- Muted group theory explains how dominant societal groups create language systems that can silence or devalue others' perspectives.
- People in dominant socioeconomic positions may lack awareness of how their language excludes or marginalizes less privileged groups.

Exercises

1. Create a list of names that you have heard that are unique. What makes these names so unique and memorable? Ask friends to give you their perceptions of those names. Does that match with what you think? Why or why not?
2. Engage in a normal conversation with a friend or family member. Without having them know what you are doing, slowly and subtly converge your communication style to theirs. Record your observations. Then, with the same person, try to diverge your communication style. Re-record your observations. Ask if the person noticed any communication changes. How did it make them feel? How did you feel? Why?
3. Make a list of all the words in the English language that are sexist or racist. Try to research those words on the Internet and determine how these words are sexist or racist. Then, provide alternatives for these words to be more politically correct.

Types of Language

Learning Objectives

1. Identify the major types of language used in communication.

2. Describe the characteristics and purposes of each type of language (e.g., formal, informal, colloquial, slang, jargon).

3. Distinguish between denotative and connotative language in various contexts.

4. Explain how figurative language (e.g., metaphors, similes, idioms) enhances or complicates meaning.

5. Apply appropriate language choices based on audience, purpose, and context.

Suppose you read or watch different types of programming. In that case, you will probably notice that there is a difference in language use based on the environment, who you are talking to, and the reason for communicating. In this section, we will discuss the different types of language. The types of language used will impact how others view you and whether they will view you positively or negatively.

Formal vs. Informal Language

You probably know by now that how we communicate in different contexts can vary. 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. This difference stems primarily from the distinction between formal and informal language. Table 4.1 provides a general overview of the major differences between formal and informal language.

Table 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.

Formal Language	Informal Language
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.
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 uses more contractions and abbreviations. If you look at your text messages, you will probably see several examples of informal language.

Jargon

Jargon is the specialized or technical language of a specific group or profession that may not be understood by outsiders.²⁶ If you are really into cars or computers, you probably know a lot about

the different parts and functions. Jargon is normally used in a specific context and may be understood outside that context. Jargon consists of a specialized vocabulary that uses words understood only by a select group of people. The business world is full of jargon. Joanna Cutrara created a list of 14 commonly heard jargon phrases used in the business world:²⁷

- Low-Hanging Fruit
- Leverage
- Open the Kimono
- Giving 110%
- Out of Pocket
- Drink the Kool-Aid
- Bio Break
- Blue Sky Training
- Tiger Team
- Idea Shower or Thought Shower
- Moving the Goal Post
- Drill Down
- Gain Traction

If you're like us, chances are you've heard a few of these jargon phrases in your workplace. Heck, you may have even used a few of them. Your workplace may even have some specific jargon that is only used within your organization. Take a minute and think through all of the jargon you hear on an average day.

Colloquialisms

Colloquialisms are the use of informal words in communication.²⁸ 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 its everyday lives. Here's a short list of some common colloquialisms you may have used yourself:

- 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

Slang

Slang refers to words that are employed by certain groups, such as young adults and teens.²⁹ Slang is more common when speaking to others rather than written. Slang is often used among people who are similar and have experience with each other. Here is a list of some common slang terms you may use in your day-to-day life:

- Bet (confirmation of an agreement)
- Bussin' (something excellent, especially when discussing something food related)
- Cringe (awkward or embarrassing)
- Extra (being over the top or dramatic)
- BAE (baby / before all else)
- On Fleek (looking perfect)
- Bye Felica (saying goodbye to someone you don't like)
- The Tea (gossip)
- Bro (typically a male friend)
- Cash (money)
- Cheesy (cheap or tacky)
- Ship (wanting people to be in a relationship, whether real or fictional)
- Frenemy (someone who is both a friend and an enemy)
- Thirsty (being overly eager or desperate)
- Throw Shade (to insult another person)
- Woke (being acutely aware of social injustice within society)

How many of these slang words do you use? What other slang words do you use? With slang, it's important to understand that this list is constantly evolving. What is common slang today could be completely passé tomorrow. What's common slang in the United States is not universal in English-speaking countries.

Idioms

Idioms are expressions or figures of speech whose meaning cannot be understood by looking at the individual words and interpreting them literally.³⁰ Idioms can help amplify messages. Idioms can provide artistic expression. For instance, "Knowledge is power!"

Idioms can be challenging for non-native speakers to grasp. As such, many instructors in the English as a Second Language (ESL) world spend a considerable amount of time explaining idioms to non-native speakers. Table 4.2 presents an array of different idioms.

Table 4.2 Common Idioms

IDIOM	MEANING/SENTENCE
ish	About. I'll meet you at 4ish.
a basket case	A wreck. He was a basket case after he was thrown off the basketball team.
a breath of fresh air	Refreshing/fun. She's a breath of fresh air.
a change of heart	Change my mind. I've had a change of heart.
a blessing in disguise	Something bad that turns out good. Losing his job turned out to be a blessing in disguise.
a dead end	That's a dead end job—time to find a new one.
a gut feeling	Feeling in my stomach. I have a gut feeling that everything is going to turn out all right.
a matter of opinion	It's a matter of opinion whether eating fried tarantulas is a gourmet treat.
a piece of cake	That test was a snap—it was a piece of cake. (easy).
a ripoff	You spent \$500 for a watermelon! What a ripoff! You were cheated.
a pain in the neck	A pest. His little brother is a real pain in the neck.
be in hot water	Be in trouble. If you tell your boss off, you'll really be in hot water.
in the same boat	We're in the same situation. We're all in the same boat—so be cool.
on the same wavelength	We have the same ideas and opinions. We're on the same wavelength.
be on the ball	Very sharp. Very smart. He's really on the ball.
it's only a matter of time	Very soon. It's only a matter of time until his boss realizes that he is the one stealing money from the till.
be that as it may	As things stand. Be that as it may, I think you should reconsider your decision to move to Antarctica.
up in arms	Really angry. His father was up in arms when he learned that he had crashed his new car.
up in the air	Not sure. Plans are up in the air—we haven't decided what to do yet.
bend over backward	Go out of your way. She really bent over backward to make my stay enjoyable.
Big deal!	Not important (sarcastic). Losing an old sock is not a big deal.
cost an arm and a leg	Very expensive. His new Ferrari cost an arm and a leg.
cross your fingers	For good luck. Cross your fingers that I pass the English exam with flying colors.
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IDIOM	MEANING/SENTENCE
draw a blank	I can't remember. I drew a blank when I tried to remember his brother's name.
Easier said than done	More difficult than it seems.
Am fed up with	Sick and tired of something. I'm fed up with whining friends who have everything!
from scratch	Make from basic ingredients. Her carrot cake was made from scratch.
for the time being	For now. For the time being, everything is fine at work.
get cold feet	Feel too scared to do something. John wanted to ask Maria out but he got cold feet and decided not to.
get out of the wrong side of the bed	In a bad mood. He must have gotten up out of the wrong side of the bed today.
get the picture	Understand. Do you get the picture?
get your act together	Get organized/stop wasting time. You better get your act together or you're going to fail all your classes.
give it a shot	Try. Why not try bungee jumping. Give it a shot.
give him a piece of your mind	Get angry and tell someone off. If I were you I would give him a piece of your mind.
give him the cold shoulder	Ignore someone. Brett walked right past me without saying a word. He gave me the cold shoulder.
go all out	Do your utmost for someone or something. His parents went all out for his graduation party.
go downhill	Get worse. After he got divorced, everything went downhill.
go up in smoke	Evaporate/disappear. His dreams of being a professional athlete went up in smoke when he broke his leg.
have a chip on your shoulder	I think you are great. He has such a chip on his shoulder that he hardly ever relates to anyone.
had it up to here	Can't take any more. I've had it up to here with noisy students!
mixed feelings	Positive and negative feelings together. I have very mixed feelings about her marrying a fisherman.
second thoughts	Thinking again about a decision. I'm having second thoughts about trekking in Greenland this summer.
throw a fit	Get really angry. His mother threw a fit when she heard that he lost her iPhone.
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IDIOM	MEANING/SENTENCE
I'm all ears	To listen intently. Tell me about your wedding plans—I'm all ears.
in the bag	Certain. His new job is in the bag. He signed the contract.
in the middle of nowhere	Way out in the country. Their ski chalet is in the middle of nowhere.
Just my luck!	Bad luck. Just my luck to lose the winning lottery ticket.
keep an eye on	Watch carefully. Will you keep an eye on my nephew while I walk the dog?
bear in mind	Keep it in mind. Bear in mind, learning a new language isn't as easy as it seems.
learn by heart	Memorize. You have to learn irregular verbs by heart.
let the cat out of the bag	Spill the beans. Tell a secret. Don't let the cat out of the bag. Keep his surprise birthday party a secret.
make my day	Make my day great. The guy I have a crush on finally called me. He made my day.
miss the point	Don't understand the basic meaning. You are missing the point entirely.-.
no way	Impossible. You got all A's on your exams and you never studied. No way!
don't have a clue	I have no idea. I don't have a clue what the professor was talking about.
don't have the faintest idea	Don't understand. I don't have the faintest idea of what that article was talking about.
off the top of my head	Without thinking. Off the top of my head, I think it's worth \$6 million.
on the dot	On time. He arrived at 6 o'clock on the dot.
out of sight, out of mind	You forget someone you don't see anymore.
out of the blue	Suddenly. Guess who called me out of the blue?
play it by ear	Make no plans—do things spontaneously. Let's just play it by ear tonight and see what comes up.
pull someone's leg	Kid someone. Stop pulling my leg. I know you are kidding!
red tape	Bureaucracy. It's almost impossible to set up a business in Greece because there is so much red tape.
read between the lines	Understand what is not stated. If you read between the lines, you'll realize that he is trying to dump you.
safe and sound	Fine. The Boy Scouts returned safe and sound from their camping adventure in Yellowstone National Park.
see eye to eye	Agree. He doesn't see eye to eye with his parents at all.
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IDIOM	MEANING/SENTENCE
sour grapes	Pretend to not want something that you are desperate for. It's just sour grapes that he is criticizing George's villa in Italy.
slipped my mind	Forgot. I meant to call you last night, but it slipped my mind.
small talk	Chitchat. It's important to be able to make small talk when you meet new people for the first time.
talk shop	Talk about work. What a boring evening! Everyone talked shop- and they're all dog walkers!
the icing on the cake	Something that makes a good thing great. And the icing on the cake was that the movie for which he earned \$12 million, also won the Oscar for best picture.
the last straw	The thing that ruins everything. When my boss asked me to cancel my wedding to complete a project—I said that's the last straw and I quit!
time flies	Time goes fast. Time flies when you are having fun.
you can say that again	You agree emphatically. Kanye West is a great singer. You can say that again!
you name it	Everything you can think of. This camp has every activity you can think it—like swimming, canoeing, basketball and you name it.
wouldn't be caught dead	Not even dead would I do something. I wouldn't be caught dead wearing that dress to the ball.
she's a doll	Someone really great. Thanks for helping me out. You're a doll.
full of beans	Lively—usually for a child. Little children are usually full of beans.
full of baloney	Not true. She's full of baloney—she doesn't know what she is talking about.
like two peas in a pod	Very similar. His two brothers are like peas in a pod.
a piece of cake	Very easy. My math test was so easy—a real piece of cake.
sounds fishy	Suspicious. Doubling your money in an hour sounds fishy to me.
a frog in my throat	I can't speak clearly. Ahem! Sorry I had a frog in my throat.
smell a rat	Something is suspicious. The policeman didn't believe the witness—in fact, he smelled a rat.
go to the dogs	Go downhill. Everything is going to the dogs in our town since the new mayor took office.
cat got your tongue	Silent for no reason. What's the matter? Cat got your tongue?
for the birds	Awful. How was the new Batman movie? Oh, it was for the birds.
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IDIOM	MEANING/SENTENCE
pay through the nose	Pay lots of money. They paid through the nose to hold their wedding at Buckingham Palace.
tongue in cheek	Being ironic. I meant that tongue in cheek. I was kidding.
all thumbs	Clumsy. He couldn't put that simple table together—he's just all thumbs.
get off my back	Leave me alone. Bug off! Get off my back!
drive me up a wall	Drive me crazy. Rude people drive me up a wall.
spill the beans	Tell a secret. Hey, don't spill the beans. It's a secret.
hit the ceiling	Blow up. His dad hit the ceiling when he saw his dreadful report card.
go fly a kite	Get lost! Oh, leave me alone! Go fly a kite!
dressed to kill	Dressed in fancy clothes. Cinderella was dressed to kill when she arrived at the ball.
in stitches	Laughing a lot. We were all in stitches when we heard the latest joke.
feel like a million dollars	Feel great. I just slept for 15 hours—I feel like a million dollars.
at the end of my rope	Can't stand it anymore. The mother of four little children is at the end of her rope.
my head is killing me	Something hurts. My head is killing me—I should take an aspirin.
that's out of the question	Impossible. Me? Stand up and sing and dance in front of the whole school—out of the question!
I'm beat	Very tired.
It'll knock your socks off!	Thrills you. You'll love this summer's action movie. It'll knock your socks off.
beats me	Don't know. What's the capital of Outer Mongolia? Beats me!
hands down	No comparison. Hands down Mykonos is the world's most beautiful island.
goody-goody	Behaves perfectly. I can't stand Matilda—she's such a goody-goody and no fun at all.
pain in the neck	A big problem. Washing dishes is a pain in the neck.
like pulling teeth	Very difficult. Trying to get 2-year-olds to cooperate is like pulling teeth.
for crying out loud	Oh no! For crying out loud—let me finish this book—will you?
I'm at my wit's end	I'm desperate. I'm at my wit's end trying to deal with two impossible bosses.
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IDIOM	MEANING/SENTENCE
like beating a dead horse	A waste of time. Trying to get my father to ever change his mind is like beating a dead horse.
out of this world	Fantastic! My vacation to Hawaii was out of this world!
cost an arm and a leg	Very expensive. A Rolls Royce costs an arm and a leg.
go figure	Try to guess why. Our English teacher gives us five tests a week and this week—no tests at all. Go figure.
in the nick of time	Just in time. The hero arrived in the nick of time to save the desperate damsel.
I'm up to my eyeballs in	Very busy. I'm up to my eyeballs in work this week.
I had a blast/a ball	A great time. I had a blast/ball at Sandy's slumber party.
win-win situation	Both sides win. Selling their old stock of iPhones 10s was a win-win situation. They got rid of the useless phones, and we bought them really cheaply.
I'm swamped	Very busy. Let's get together next week—this week I'm swamped.
It's a steal	Fantastic bargain. Getting a new computer for \$300 dollars is a steal.
the sticks	Way out in the country. Who would want to live in the sticks—what would you do for excitement?
break the ice	Start a conversation. Talking about the weather is a good way to break the ice when you meet someone new.
give me a break	Leave me alone! Come on! Give me a break! I've been working all day long- and I just want to play a little bit of Angry Birds....
like talking to the wall	A waste of time. Dealing with many teenagers is like talking to a wall—they won't even respond to your questions.
see eye to eye	Agree. I hardly ever see eye to eye with my parents.
It's about time	It's time. It's about time you started your homework—it's midnight!
pays peanuts	Pays hardly anything. This job pays peanuts—\$1 an hour!.
sleep like a log	Sleep soundly. Last night I slept like a log and didn't hear the thunderstorm at all.
ace	Do great. I aced the math test. I got 100%.
easy as pie	Super easy. The English test was as easy as pie.
blabbermouth	Someone who tells secrets. Don't tell Sophie your secrets or the whole town will know them.
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IDIOM	MEANING/SENTENCE
don't bug me	Don't bother me. Don't bug me—I'm busy.
by the skin of my teeth	Barely manage something. I passed the geography test by the skin of my teeth.
can't make head nor tail of	I can't understand. I can't make head nor tail of this math chapter.
cool as a cucumber	Very calm. The policeman was cool as a cucumber when he persuaded the man not to jump off the Brooklyn Bridge.
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Clichés

Cliché is an idea or expression that has been so overused that it has lost its original meaning.³¹ 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 convey ideas and thoughts that are commonly used in everyday language. They are prevalent in advertisements, television, and literature.

Improper Language

Improper language is not proper, correct, or applicable in certain situations.³² There are two different types of improper language: vulgarity and cursing. First, vulgarity includes language that is offensive or lacks good taste. Often, vulgar refers to something lewd or obscene. Second, cursing is language that includes a wish of evil, doom, misfortune on a person or group. It can also include curse or profane words. People might differ in their perceptions about improper language.

Biased Language

Biased language is language that shows preference in favor of or against a certain point of view, shows prejudice, or is demeaning to others.³³ Bias in language is uneven or unbalanced. Examples of this may include “mankind” as opposed to “humanity.”

Table 4.3 Biased Language

Avoid	Consider Using
Black Attorney	Attorney
Businessman	Businessperson, Business Owner, Executive, Leader, Manager, etc.
Chairman	Chair or Chairperson
Cleaning Lady / Maid	Cleaner, Cleaning Person, Housecleaner, Housekeeper, Maintenance Worker, Office Cleaner,

Avoid	Consider Using
	etc.
Male Nurse	Nurse
Male Flight Attendant or Stewardess	Flight Attendant
Female Doctor	Physician or Doctor
Manpower	Personnel or Staff
Congressman	Legislator, Member of Congress, or Member of the House of Representatives
Postman	Postal Employee or Letter carrier
Forefather	Ancestor
Policeman	Police Officer / Law Enforcement Officer
Fireman	Firefighter
Disabled	People with Disabilities
Schizophrenic	Person Diagnosed with Schizophrenia
Homosexual	Lesbians, Gay Men, Bisexual Men or Women

One specific type of biased language is called spin, which involves manipulating language to achieve the most positive interpretation of words, gain a political advantage, or deceive others. People using spin can make language choices that positively frame themselves or their clients.

Ambiguous Language

Ambiguous language is language that can have various meanings. Google Jay Leno's headlines videos. Sometimes he uses very abstract advertisements. For instance, a restaurant ad states, "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 try to communicate with others, we must use clear language. We need others to understand exactly what we mean and not infer a different meaning. That is why you need to make sure that you don't use ambiguous 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 they seem 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 who complains about her salary. However, other college professors would love to have a salary like hers. Our language is based on our perception of our experiences. For instance, if someone asked you what your ideal salary would be, 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!

Static Evaluation

Often, we think that people and things do not change, but they change. If you ever watch afternoon talk shows, you might see people who go through amazing transformations, perhaps through weight loss, a makeover, or surgery or some sort. These people changed. **Static evaluation** states that things are not constant. Things change over time, and our language should reflect that evolution. For instance, Max is bad. It is essential to note that Max may have exhibited poor behavior at one point, but it does not represent how Max will behave in the future.

Mindfulness Activity



For the entire day, we encourage you to take a moment to pause before texting or emailing someone. When we text or email someone, we typically just put our thoughts together in a quick fashion. Take a second to decide how you plan to use your words. Consider which words would be most effective in conveying our message. After you have typed your message, take another few minutes to reread the message. Be mindful of how others might interpret your message. Would they read it at face value, or would they misinterpret the message because there is a lack of nonverbal messages? Do you need to add emojis or GIFS to change how the message is conveyed?

Researchers have found that when college students can acknowledge and manage their emotions, and are mindful of their feelings, it can enhance their written communication with

others.³⁴ After doing this activity, try to be more mindful of the things that you send to other people.

Key Takeaways

- Language can be categorized into various types, including formal, informal, colloquial, slang, and jargon, each serving distinct communicative purposes.
- Formal language is structured and used in professional or serious contexts, while informal and colloquial language is more relaxed and common in everyday conversations.
- Slang and jargon are specialized forms of language often used within specific groups to signal identity or expertise.
- Denotative meanings refer to literal definitions, whereas connotative meanings encompass emotional or cultural associations that can influence interpretation.
- Figurative language adds depth and creativity to communication, but may confuse audiences if they are unfamiliar with the expressions or metaphors used.
- Effective communicators choose language intentionally, adapting to the expectations of their audience and the demands of the situation.

Exercises

1. Create a list of jargon or slang words that you use and what they mean. Determine if there are differences in how words are used now and in the past.
2. Create a list of colloquialisms or idioms. Find an international student and see if these words are familiar to them. What was confusing or unclear?
3. Find clichés that are used in other cultures. Determine if you can find an American equivalent of each cliché.

Improving Verbal Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Describe effective strategies for expanding personal vocabulary.
2. Identify techniques for enhancing language awareness and adaptation.
3. Explain the concept and importance of checking for understanding in communication.
4. Apply the TAP method to ensure message clarity during interpersonal interactions.

In this chapter, you have learned the importance of language. In this last section, we will discuss ways to improve your verbal communication skills. To be a great interpersonal communicator, it is extremely important that you also know how to use language in the most effective way.

Improving Language Skills

From an early age, you probably had words that you used most frequently because you were familiar with those words. As you get older and become more educated, your vocabulary has probably expanded to help you become more successful. Language is used to help express our feelings, intentions, and comprehension of others.³⁵ An extensive vocabulary is a keen predictor of someone's social status, education, and profession. Whether or not you like it, the words we use and the grammatical structure of how we use those words can affect our standing in school, work, and society. Here are some tips to help you improve your vocabulary.

Use Repetition

First, be sure to use repetition. To become familiar with a word, you need to see it repeatedly. Additionally, you need to use it in conversations repeatedly. The more times you repeat the word, the more likely you will memorize it, and it will become part of your daily repertoire.

Group Similar Words Together

Second, group similar words together. You should never learn vocabulary by looking at a list of words. Think of words as different pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. It makes little sense to look at each piece of the puzzle individually. Rather, you need to fit them together to see the whole picture. The same thing should occur with words. You should memorize words that have similarities in some way. For instance, create a vocabulary around a theme, such as music, or an adjective, like “beautiful.”

Build Your Vocabulary

Third, it is essential to make vocabulary that is personal to you. **Vocabulary** can be defined as all the words understood by a person or group of people. As early as four months, a baby can start to distinguish between language sounds and other sounds. According to David Crystal, language acquisition happens rapidly:

- By age 2, people can recognize and speak 200 words.
- By age 3, people can recognize and speak about 2000 words.

- By age 5, people can recognize and speak about 4,000 words.³⁶

That means your average infant to toddler is learning three to four unfamiliar words every day. Infants are hardwired to learn a language. To ensure your child can speak multiple languages, it's best to expose them to multiple languages during this crucial developmental stage. Even though we start as infants, we continue to improve our vocabularies right through middle age:

- Most adult native test-takers range from 20,000–35,000 words
- Average native test-takers of age 8 already know 10,000 words
- Average native test-takers of age 4 already know 5,000 words
- Adult native test-takers learn almost 1 new word a day until middle age
- Adult test-taker vocabulary growth basically stops at middle age³⁷

As you can see, most native English-speaking adults have fairly substantial vocabularies, but we do see a drop in new language acquisition as people enter into their middle age. As such, it's important to keep learning.

One way to keep learning is to find words that have meaning for you. If you have ever heard a story about survival from someone who has gone through something life-changing, they probably used words that touched you and helped you connect to the story. In the same fashion, find words that can relate to your story. When we find words that have personal meaning to us, we can use those words more effectively in our vocabulary. Here are some essential tips for building your vocabulary:

1. Keep a journal of words you don't know.
2. If you don't know a word, look it up in a dictionary.
3. Learn to recognize both Latin and Greek roots of words.
4. Play vocabulary games (e.g., anagrams, Boggle, crossword puzzles, Scrabble, etc.).
5. Make synonym and antonym word lists.
6. Take a writing and/or editing course.

Read

Last, you should read regularly. It doesn't matter what you read. As long as you are reading, you will probably come across words that you are unfamiliar with. When you come across a word you don't know, take the time to look it up. This practice is especially important when reading academic works, as they are often full of technical terms. Next time you read and run across a word that you don't know, be sure to find the definition so that you can comprehend what is being said.

We would also recommend reading articles and books that stretch you. Don't just read books like *Twilight* and *Harry Potter* because those are written on a junior high or middle school reading level.

Increase Your Awareness and Adaptation of Language

After learning to improve your vocabulary, it's also important to increase language awareness and adaptation. When we talk about **language awareness**, we are referring to a person's ability to be mindful and sensitive to all functions and forms of language.³⁸ For our purposes, we define **lan-**

guage adaptation as the ability to alter one's linguistic choices in a communicatively competent manner. As such, it's not just about being aware of language that leads to effective interpersonal interactions, but also our ability to adapt our linguistic choices to different people, thereby maximizing the effectiveness of our interpersonal communication.

There are several ways that people can enhance their language awareness and adaptation. The first way is to engage in meaningful interpersonal communication with someone different from you. This person can be from a different country or a different region of the country from you. When you speak to someone very different from you, you might notice how they use language differently or how they prefer certain words over others.

Another way might be to watch a foreign film. Explore various international films that have been nominated for Academy Awards. Most of them will be dubbed in English or have English subtitles. Pay attention to how the characters communicate with each other to create meaning. Does it give you an appreciation for how you speak?

Lastly, spend some time with a small child, preferably under the age of five. Pay attention to how the child communicates with you compared to others (e.g., friends, parents/guardians, siblings). Children under five are still acquiring words and learning to talk. When you communicate with someone who has a very limited vocabulary, it can help you see how to adapt your language so that they can understand you.

Check for Understanding

As a speaker, you want to know that the receiver of your message understood what you said. This concept is also known as checking for understanding or verifying what has been said is also understood.³⁹ Even if a person is smiling and nodding at you when you talk, it does not necessarily mean that they are paying attention to everything. They might be trying to be polite and/or friendly. The best way to check for understanding is to use the acronym: TAP. Think of communication like a tap dance; if you don't hear any tapping, would it really be a tap dance? The same thing can be applied to communication. Did you communicate if the other person didn't understand you or get what you were trying to say?

First, the T in TAP means to talk first. In other words, you explicitly present all the content. As you are talking, you are also trying to make sure that the other person is listening to you talk.

Second, the A in TAP stands for ask questions. After you talked to the person, try to ask specific questions. Rather than saying, "Did you hear me?" or "Were you listening?", which are both yes/no questions, it would be more beneficial to ask, "What did I just say?" or "What did you hear me say?"

Third, the P in TAP means to be prepared to listen. Listen carefully to what the other person says. It is during this phase that you can see if they understood your message. Was the message correct? What emotions are they displaying after you said the message and asked questions? If we don't ask questions, then we can't be sure that the message was received effectively.

Key Takeaways

- Improving vocabulary involves intentional strategies such as repetition, grouping similar words, using words with personal meaning, playing word games, and reading regularly.
- Language awareness refers to the ability to be mindful of how language functions, while adaptation involves adjusting language to suit the context and audience. Engaging with people from diverse backgrounds or observing child language use can enhance both.
- Checking for understanding is critical to ensuring your message was received. A nod or smile does not always equal comprehension.
- The TAP method—Talk first, Ask questions, and Prepare to listen—helps confirm your message was heard, interpreted correctly, and responded to appropriately.

Exercises

1. Go through the various key terms within this chapter. Did you know all of the definitions before reading this chapter? Which terms did you find difficult to understand? Why?
2. Read a speech from either [Vital Speeches of the Day](#) or [American Rhetoric](#). After reading/watching a speech, find a video where the speaker was interviewed. Watch how the speaker sounds when both giving a speech and when answering questions. Analyze the speaker's use of both language awareness and adaptation.
3. Find someone who does not speak English as their first language. During your interaction with that person, put the TAP Method for understanding into practice. How easily did you know this other person? Why? How did it feel to use the TAP method? Were you effective during your interpersonal interaction? Why?

Key Terms

abstract

abstraction ladder

affiliation

ambiguous language

bias

biased language

buzz word	language adaptation
cliché	language awareness
colloquialism	linguistic determinism
connotation	linguistic relativity
converge	metamessage
denotation	personal function
discourse	racism
diverge	racist language
euphemism	regulatory function
formal language	relative language
heuristic function	representational function
idiom	Sapir-Whorf hypothesis
imaginative function	sexism
informal language	sexist language
instrumental function	slang
interactional function	spin
jargon	static evaluation
language	vocabulary

Chapter Wrap-Up

In this chapter, we discussed the importance of verbal communication. To be an effective verbal communicator, it is necessary to understand that the words you use convey meanings you might intentionally or unintentionally communicate to others. However, the meaning of language can vary from person to person.

This chapter also discusses the various rules of language. Verbal communication serves many purposes and works to clarify the meaning of nonverbal communication. The type of language you use can impact how others perceive you.

Finally, this chapter discusses the subcategories of verbal communication. The subcategories of verbal communication enable us to understand how misunderstandings can occur when language is not used effectively.

Chapter Exercises

Real-World Case Study

Kory was an introverted and timid sixth-grader who moved to a new school. One day, he was searching the Internet and came across a negative website about him that had been posted by some of his classmates. On the webpage, many of the students called him horrible names and made some damaging and hurtful remarks about his looks and sexuality. Every day, the words would get worse. The language became unbearable, and he went through a lot of torment because all the statements about him were untrue. Kory had endured cyberbullying. He had considered suicide.

Cyberbullying seems to be a growing problem these days. Think about the way you would deal with this situation. Here are some questions to discuss:

1. As a student of this school, how can you stop this treatment?
2. As a teacher or staff member, what can you do to prevent this from happening to others?
How can you fix the problem now?
3. What are some ways to help Kory?
4. What should Kory do?
5. How should he respond?

End-of-Chapter Assessment

1. The fact that the words “Come Here!” can have different interpretations based on the source of the message is related to:
 - a. semantic
 - b. verbal
 - c. syntactic
 - d. pragmatic
 - e. discourse
2. According to the abstraction ladder, which of the following statements is the most abstract?
 - a. You are lazy!
 - b. You need to tell me what I need to do to lose five pounds this month.
 - c. You should workout.
 - d. You need to eat healthier.
 - e. That dress is too small on you and does not fit.
3. Larry is madly in love with Sarah. You can tell this when he tells he brings her flowers or writes new songs to sing to her. Larry is using _____ to convey his feelings.
 - a. abstraction
 - b. connotation
 - c. denotation
 - d. discourse
 - e. metamessages

4. Saying “I love you” every time you see your grandmother is a _____ function.
 - a. regulatory
 - b. imaginative
 - c. interactional
 - d. personal
 - e. ritual
5. In this chapter, you learned all of the following except:
 - a. how naming affects perceptions
 - b. language can impact affiliations
 - c. there are three different rules to understanding language
 - d. language can be sexist or racist
 - e. language can influence perceptions of credibility

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Nonverbal communication is defined as communication that is produced by some means other than words (eye contact, body language, or vocal cues, for example).¹ Over the past decade, Botox

has been used to paralyze facial muscles for reducing the appearance of wrinkles. However, the unintended consequence of this practice is reduced facial expression! The frozen facial expression was recently celebrated by Shape.com, who interviewed a noted plastic surgeon about Hollywood's most notable "frozen faces" (See Figure 5.1). The reality starlet pictured is only 40, but she is already a fan of Botox, "as you can tell by her taught forehead," Dr. Youn says. "Some stars start treatment early, hoping to prevent wrinkles, but risk robbing their face of natural emotions in the process!"

Imagine the lack of a variety of emotional facial expressions if everyone's face were frozen. The world would be a much less interesting place, and it would be more challenging to stimulate accurate meaning in the minds of others. Now, imagine actors such as Jim Carrey freezing their faces. His work would be much less meaningful and less powerful. Thus, we will begin this chapter by discussing the importance of nonverbal communication.

Importance of Nonverbal Communication in Interaction

Learning Objectives

1. Describe the role nonverbal communication plays in daily interpersonal interactions.
2. Identify key characteristics that make nonverbal communication powerful and complex.
3. Explain the six primary functions of nonverbal communication.
4. Classify examples of nonverbal behavior according to their communicative function.
5. Discuss how cultural differences and attribution errors can affect nonverbal communication.

Earlier in this book, we introduced the concept of "you cannot, not communicate." The foundation of this idea is that even though we may not be sending verbal messages, we are continually sending nonverbal messages. As such, it's very important to understand how nonverbal messages affect our daily interpersonal interactions. In this section, we will discuss the role that nonverbal communication plays in our daily lives and the six primary functions of nonverbal communication.

The Role of Nonverbal in Everyday Life

We communicate nonverbally constantly. It's the primary way that we communicate with other people. Below, we will explore the role that nonverbal communication plays in our day-to-day lives.

Nonverbal has Communicative Value

The significance of nonverbal communication in any interaction cannot be overstated. In any interaction, Albert Mehrabian² argues that the majority of meaning comes from nonverbal communication. We will discuss his theories in more detail later. In this chapter, you will learn about the many types of nonverbal communication present in the interaction. For example, if you are having a conversation with your friend who just broke up with her girlfriend, you will use more than the words “I just broke up with my girlfriend” to understand how to communicate with your friend. Your friend’s facial expression, way of standing, rate of speech, tone of voice, and general appearance, to name a few, will indicate to you how you should respond. If she is sobbing, gasping for air, hunched over, and appears emotionally pained, you might attempt to comfort her. If she says, “I just broke up with my girlfriend” and sighs while placing her hand over her heart, she might appear relieved. Your response might be, “It seems like you may be a little relieved. Were things not going well?”

Thus, nonverbal communication plays a tremendous role in successfully engaging in interactions. The successful use of nonverbal communication requires an awareness of its value and a belief in its importance. When individuals are unaware of the importance of nonverbal communication, they may be overlooking crucial interactional information. For example, one author of this textbook was once met with a colleague who repeatedly sighed during a meeting. Later, when she and her colleague were discussing the meeting, he said, “Didn’t you notice I was sighing?” She told him that she had noticed he was sighing, but she was unsure why. We will discuss this further in the ambiguity of nonverbal communication. In this example, the author’s colleague was aware of the importance of nonverbal communication and attempted to use it deliberately.

Besides awareness, individuals must believe that nonverbal communication is valuable. If your parent/guardian ever said to you, “It wasn’t what you said, it was how you said it.” Your parent/guardian was demonstrating a belief that nonverbal communication is essential. An individual may acknowledge that nonverbal communication exists but may discount its value. For example, one of our coauthors had a recurring argument with their spouse, who would sigh or roll her eyes as a response in interactions. The author would ask the spouse what it meant, and the spouse would inevitably say, “I can sigh or roll my eyes without it meaning anything.” This is not an uncommon response, but the authors of this text hope to dispel this perception.

For a better understanding of the value of communication, Google “value of communication.” Your search will return over a billion links. While it is not possible to review all of the search results, read through a few of the articles. For this exercise, we found titles like “The Value of Effective Communication in the Workplace” and “Why Communication Is Today’s Most Important Skill.”³ In fact, we found almost 300,000 articles with the phrase “value of communication.” These news articles inform readers that effective communication secures customers, fosters bonds between employees, and boosts revenues.

Nonverbal Used for Relational Purposes

Nonverbal communication is a crucial element in forming relationships with others. Nonverbal communication is often the first way we initiate a relationship with another, or at the very least,

establish initial contact. To communicate with another, we must make eye contact, with a few exceptions. Thus, relationships begin with nonverbal communication. Additionally, consider how humans interact with others through touch, scent, hand gestures, physical appearance, and other means.

Humans often use nonverbal communication to convey to others their interest in continuing or ending a conversation. For example, you may run into a colleague and strike up a spontaneous conversation in the hall. The conversation is enjoyable, and you each relate to the other in that you are enjoying conversing about work. Your colleague may recognize that he needs to get to a meeting and relate this information to you by looking at his watch, beginning to back away, or looking at the door he needs to enter.

Another way we relate to others through nonverbal communication is by conveying emotions. Through a myriad of nonverbal behaviors, we can communicate emotions such as joy, happiness, and sadness. The nonverbal expression of emotion allows others to know how to communicate with us.

Nonverbal is Ambiguous

A challenging aspect of nonverbal communication is that it is often ambiguous. In the 1970s, nonverbal communication was a trendy topic. Some thought we could use nonverbal communication to “read others like a book.” One coauthor remembers her cousin’s wife telling her that she shouldn’t cross her arms because it signaled to others that she was closed off. It would be wonderful if crossing one’s arms signaled one meaning, but think about the many meanings of crossing one’s arms. An individual may cross their arms because they are cold, upset, sad, or angry. It is impossible to know unless a conversation is paired with nonverbal behavior.

Another great example of ambiguous nonverbal behavior is flirting! Consider some very stereotypical behavior of flirting (e.g., smiling, laughing, a light touch on the arm, or prolonged eye contact). Each of these behaviors signals interest to others. The question is whether an individual engaging in these behaviors is showing romantic interest or a desire for platonic friendship. Have you ever walked away from a situation and explained a person’s behavior to another friend to determine whether you were being flirted with? If so, you have undoubtedly experienced the ambiguity of nonverbal communication.

Nonverbal is Culturally Based

Just as we have discussed that it is beneficial to recognize the value of nonverbal communication; we also acknowledge that nonverbal communication is culturally based. Successful interactions with individuals from other cultures are partially based on the ability to adapt to or understand the nonverbal behaviors associated with different cultures. There are two aspects to understanding that nonverbal communication is culturally based. The first aspect is recognizing that even if we do not know the appropriate nonverbal communication with someone from another culture, we must at least acknowledge that there is a need to be flexible, not react, and ask questions. The second aspect is recognizing that there are specific aspects of nonverbal communication that differ depending on the culture. When entering a new culture, we must learn the customs and norms of that culture.

When recognizing differences, you may encounter someone from a culture that communicates in a manner very different from your own, and perhaps unexpectedly. For example, one of the author's brothers, Patrick, was working in Afghanistan as a contractor on a military base. He was working with a man from Africa. During their first conversation, he held Patrick's hand. Patrick later told his sister, the author, this story and said he wasn't sure how to respond, so he "just rolled with it." Patrick's response allowed for the most flexibility in the situation and the best chance of moving forward productively. Imagine if he had withdrawn his hand quickly with a surprised look on his face. The outcome of the interaction would have been very different.

Patrick's response also exemplifies the second aspect of understanding that nonverbal communication is culturally based. Patrick was hired by a contractor to work on the military base in Afghanistan. The contracting firm could have trained Patrick and his coworkers about communicating with the various cultures they would encounter on the base. For example, many Filipinos were working on the base. It would have been helpful for the contractors to explain that there may be differences in spatial distance and touch when communicating with other males from the Philippines. Researching and understanding the nonverbal communication of different countries before entering the country can often mean a smoother entry phase, whether conducting business or simply visiting.

Attribution Error

A final area to address before examining specific aspects of nonverbal communication is "attribution error." **Attribution error** is defined as the tendency to explain another individual's behavior in relation to the individual's internal tendencies rather than an external factor.⁴ For example, if a friend is late, we might attribute this failure to be on time as the friend being irresponsible rather than running through a list of external factors that may have influenced the friend's ability to be on time, such as an emergency, traffic, reading the time wrong, etc. It is easy to make an error when trying to attribute meaning to the behaviors of others, and nonverbal communication is vulnerable to attribution error.

On Saturday, September 8, 2018, Serena Williams may have been a victim of an umpire's attribution error by the judge. Let's say Serena suffered because of attribution error. The judge spotted Serena Williams' coach gesturing in the audience and assumed that the gesture was explicitly directed toward Serena to coach her. Her coach later acknowledged that he was "coaching" via nonverbal signals, but Serena was not looking at him, nor was she intended to be a recipient. Her coach indicated that all coaches gesture while sitting in the stands as though they are coaching a practice and that it's a habit and not an other-oriented communication behavior. This is a perfect example of attribution error. The judge attributed the coach's gesture to the coach's intention to communicate, rather than the gesture being merely a habit. The judge's attribution error may have cost Serena Williams' comeback match. While the stakes may not be high in day-to-day interactions, attribution error can create relational strife and general misunderstandings that can be avoided if we recognize the need to understand the intention behind a specific nonverbal behavior.

Omnipresent

According to Dictionary.com, omnipresent indicates being everywhere at the same time. Nonverbal communication is always present. Silence is an excellent example of nonverbal communication being omnipresent. Have you ever given someone the “silent treatment?” If so, you understand that by remaining silent, you are trying to convey some meaning, such as “You hurt me” or “I’m really upset with you.” Thus, silence makes nonverbal communication omnipresent.

Another way to consider the omnipresence of nonverbal communication is to examine our body language, including posture, facial expressions, eye contact, lack of eye contact, and gestures. When sitting alone in the library working, your posture may communicate something to others. If you need to focus and don’t want to engage in conversation, you may keep your head down and avoid eye contact. Suppose you are walking across campus at a brisk pace. What might your pace be communicating?

When discussing the omnipresence of nonverbal communication, it is necessary to discuss Paul Watzlawick’s assertion that humans cannot, not communicate. This assertion is the first axiom of his interactional view of communication. According to Watzlawick, humans are constantly engaged in communication. As discussed in the “silent treatment” example and the posture and walking example, communication is found in everyday behaviors that are common to all humans. We might conclude that humans cannot escape communicating meaning.

Can Form a Universal Language

When discussing whether nonverbal communication is a universal language, caution is necessary. We must remember that understanding the context in which nonverbal communication is used is almost always necessary to understand the meaning of nonverbal communication. If you have ever been to another country, there might be times when you may not speak the same language, but through your nonverbal communication behaviors, then other person is able to interpret your message. However, there are exceptions concerning what Paul Ekman calls “basic emotions.” These will be discussed a bit later in the chapter.

Can Lead to Misunderstandings

Comedian Samuel J. Comroe has tremendous expertise in explaining how nonverbal communication can be misunderstood. Comroe’s comedic routines focus on how Tourette’s syndrome affects his daily life. Tourette’s syndrome can change individual behavior, from uncontrolled body movements to uncontrolled vocalizations. Comroe often appears to be winking when he is not. He explains how his “wink” can cause others to believe he is joking when he isn’t. He also tells the story of how he met his wife in high school. During a skit, he played a criminal and she played a police officer. She told him to “freeze,” and he continued to move (due to Tourette’s). She misunderstood his movement to mean he was being defiant and thus “took him down.” [You can watch Comroe’s routine here.](#)

Although nonverbal misunderstandings can be humorous, these misunderstandings can affect interpersonal as well as professional relationships. One of our coauthors went on an important job interview (didn’t get the job). She asked the interviewer for feedback, and he said, “Your answers

sounded canned.” The author did not think to do so in the moment, but what she should have said is that she may have sounded canned because she frequently thinks about work, her work philosophy, and how she approaches work. Thus, her tone may have been more indicative of simply knowing how she feels rather than “canned.”

As you continue to learn about nonverbal communication, consider how you come to understand nonverbal communication in interactions. Sometimes, the meaning of nonverbal communication can be fairly obvious. Most of the time, a head nod in conversation means something positive, such as agreement, “yes,” or “keep talking,” etc. At other times, the meaning of nonverbal communication isn’t clear. Have you ever asked a friend, “Did she sound rude to you?” about a customer service representative? If so, you are familiar with the ambiguity of nonverbal communication.

Usually Trusted

Despite the pitfalls of nonverbal communication, individuals often rely on it to understand the meaning in interactions. Communication scholars agree that most meaning in any interaction is attributable to nonverbal communication. It isn’t true, but we are taught from a very early age that a lack of eye contact indicates lying. We have learned through research that this “myth” is not true; it tells a story about how our culture perceives nonverbal communication. That view is simply that nonverbal communication is important and that it has meaning.

Another excellent example of nonverbal communication being trusted may be related to a scenario many have experienced. Children, adolescents, and teenagers will be required by their parents/guardians to say, “I’m sorry” to a sibling or the parent/guardian. Alternatively, you may have said “yes” to your parents/guardians, but your parents/guardians don’t believe you. A parent/guardian might say in either of these scenarios, “It wasn’t what you said; it was how you said it.” Thus, we find yet another example of nonverbal communication being the “go-to” for meaning in an interaction.

According to research, as much as 93% of the meaning in any interaction is because of nonverbal communication. Albert Mehrabian asserts that 93% of meaning can be broken into three parts (Figure 5.2).⁵

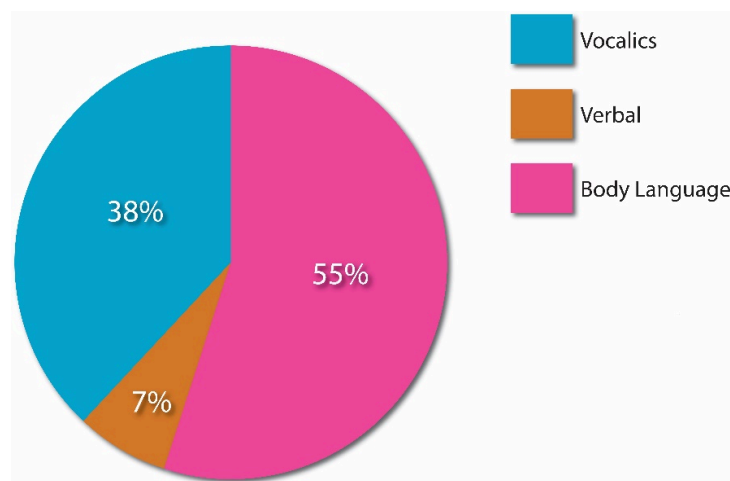


Figure 5.2 Mehrabian’s Explanation of Message Meaning

Mehrabian's work is widely reported and accepted. Other researchers have noted that the meaning attributed to nonverbal communication in interactions ranges from 60 to 70%.^{6 7} Regardless of the actual percentage, most meaning in interaction is deduced from nonverbal communication. However, this does not mean that meaning is completely separate from verbal communication. People use a combination of both when ascertaining meaning.

The Six Functions of Nonverbal Communication

As we have established, nonverbal communication plays a crucial role in effective communication. Because nonverbal communication plays a significant role in interactions, it was heavily studied in the early days of communication research. These studies resulted in the discovery of multiple utilitarian functions of nonverbal communication (Figure 5.3)

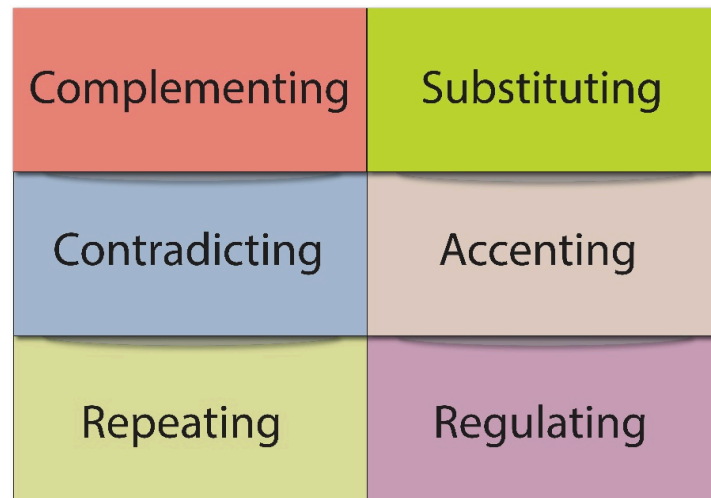


Figure 5.3 Six Functions of Nonverbal Communication

Complementing

Complementing is defined as nonverbal behavior used in conjunction with the verbal portion of the message to enhance the overall meaning. An excellent example of complementing behavior is when a child is exclaiming, "I'm so excited" while jumping up and down. The child's body further emphasizes the meaning of "I'm so excited."

Contradicting

An individual's nonverbal communication may contradict their verbal communication. Recently, when visiting an aunt's house, one of the author's folded her arms. She asked the author if she was cold and if she needed to turn up the air conditioning. The author said no because she was trying to be polite, but her aunt did not believe her. The author's nonverbal communication gave away her actual discomfort! Here, the nonverbal communication was truly more meaningful than verbal communication.

Consider a situation where a friend says, “The concert was amazing,” but the friend’s voice is monotone. A response might be, “Oh, you sound really enthused.” Communication scholars refer to this as “contradicting” verbal and nonverbal behavior. When contradicting occurs, the verbal and nonverbal messages are incongruent. This incongruence heightens our awareness, and we tend to believe the nonverbal communication over verbal communication.

Accenting

Accenting is a form of nonverbal communication that emphasizes a word or a part of a message. The word or part of the message accented might change the meaning of the message. Accenting can be accomplished through multiple types of nonverbal behavior. Gestures paired with a word can provide emphasis, such as when an individual says, “No (slams hand on table), you don’t understand me.” By slamming the hand on a table while saying “no,” the source draws attention to the word. Words or phrases can also be emphasized via pauses. Speakers will often pause before saying something important. Your professors likely pause just before relaying information that is important to the course content.

Repeating

Nonverbal communication that reinforces the meaning of verbal communication helps the receiver by confirming the sender’s words. Nonverbal communication that repeats verbal communication may stand alone, but when paired with verbal communication, it serves to repeat the message. For example, nodding one’s head while saying “yes” serves to reinforce the meaning of the word “yes,” and the word “yes” reinforces the head nod.

Regulating

Regulating the flow of communication is often accomplished through nonverbal communication. Paul Ekman and Wallace Friesen state that regulators are “acts which maintain and regulate the back-and-forth nature of speaking and listening between two or more interactions.”⁸ You may notice your friends nodding their heads when you are speaking. Nodding one’s head is a primary means of regulating communication. Other behaviors that regulate conversational flow are eye contact, moving or leaning forward, changing posture, and eyebrow raises, to name a few. You may also have noticed several nonverbal behaviors people engage in when trying to exit a conversation. These behaviors include stepping away from the speaker, checking one’s watch/phone for the time, or packing up belongings. These are referred to as leave-taking behaviors. Without the regulating function of nonverbal behaviors, it would be necessary to interrupt conversational content to insert phrases such as “I have to leave.” However, when interactants fail to recognize regulating behavior, verbal communication will be used instead.

Substituting

Nonverbal behavior can serve as a substitute for verbal communication altogether. Substituting nonverbal behavior must be understood within a context more often than not. For example, a friend

may ask you what time it is, and you may shrug your shoulders to indicate you don't know. At other times, your friend may ask whether you want pizza or sushi for dinner, and you may shrug your shoulders to show you don't care or have no preference.

Emblems are a specific type of substituting nonverbal behavior that has a direct verbal translation. Emblems may be understood outside of the context in which they are used. Some highly recognizable emblems in the United States are the peace sign and the “okay” sign. Emblems are an understood concept and have made their way into popular culture. The term “emblem” may not be applied within popular culture. In the popular television show, *Friends*, the main characters Ross and Monica are siblings. Ross and Monica are forbidden to “flip the bird” to each other, so they make up their own “emblem,” which involves holding one's palms upward in a fist and bumping the outsides of the palms together. Whether flipping the bird in the traditional manner or doing so Ross and Monica style, each of these represents an emblem that does not require context for accurate interpretation. Emblems will be discussed in greater depth later in the chapter.

Key Takeaways

- Nonverbal communication is constant, often more trusted than verbal communication, and contributes significantly to how meaning is conveyed in daily interactions.
- Nonverbal communication has communicative value, is culturally based, often ambiguous, and can lead to misunderstandings or attribution errors when misread.
- The six functions of nonverbal communication describe how nonverbal cues support, shape, or replace spoken language:
 - Complementing (enhancing or emphasizing verbal messages)
 - Contradicting (conflicting with verbal messages, revealing hidden meaning)
 - Accenting (highlighting parts of verbal messages for emphasis)
 - Repeating (reinforcing verbal messages with matching nonverbal cues)
 - Regulating (managing the flow of conversation through cues like nodding or eye contact)
 - Substituting (replacing spoken words entirely with gestures or expressions)
- Cultural norms heavily influence how nonverbal messages are sent and received, making it essential to stay flexible and context-aware in diverse interactions.
- Misinterpreting nonverbal cues or assuming intent without context can lead to attribution errors, which can negatively affect relationships and communication outcomes.

Exercises

1. Create a list of five situations in which nonverbal communication helped you to interpret verbal communication accurately. Use the functions of nonverbal communication in your description.
2. Reflect upon the functions of nonverbal communication and provide an example from your own life for each function.
3. Experiment with nonverbal communication. Use an unexpected nonverbal cue when having conversations with friends throughout the day. For example, use a contradictory nonverbal cue, such as shaking your head while saying 'yes'. Note your friend's reaction and be ready to explain.

Categories of Nonverbal Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Identify and define the major categories of nonverbal communication.
2. Classify examples of behavior under the correct nonverbal category.
3. Explain the communicative role of each nonverbal category in everyday interactions.
4. Distinguish between categories that focus on body behavior, vocal cues, and environmental elements.
5. Illustrate how nonverbal categories interact with verbal messages to shape meaning.

Besides the functions of nonverbal communication, there are categories of nonverbal communication. This chapter will address several categories of nonverbal communication that are particularly important in interpersonal relationships. These categories include haptics (touch), vocalics (voice), kinesics (body movement and gestures), oculusics/facial expressions (eye and face behavior), and physical appearance. Each of these categories influences interpersonal communication and can impact the success of interpersonal interactions.

Haptics

Haptics is the study of touch as a form of nonverbal communication. Touch is used in our daily lives for various purposes, including greeting, comfort, affection, task accomplishment, and control. You may have engaged in one or more of these behaviors today. If you shook hands with someone,

hugged a friend, or 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 accomplishing a task. 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. Here, 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 the touch endures. Frequency refers to the rate of touch, and intensity represents the degree 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.”⁹ 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 initiate, regulate, and maintain relationships. It is a powerful form of communication that can convey messages ranging from comfort to power. Duration, frequency, and intensity of touch can convey liking, attraction, or dominance. Touch can be both helpful and harmful, and it must be used appropriately to foster 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.

It’s also essential to understand the importance of touch on someone’s psychological well-being. Narissra Punyanunt-Carter and Jason Wrench developed the Touch Deprivation Scale to investigate the impact of a lack of haptic communication on an individual’s life.¹⁰

Touch Deprivation Scale

Instructions: Read the following questions and select the answer that corresponds with how you perceive physical contact with other people. Do not be concerned if some of the items appear similar. Please use the scale below to rate the degree to which each statement applies to you:

Never True	Rarely True	Sometimes True	Often True	Almost Always True
1	2	3	4	5

Work quickly; record your first impression.

_____1. I do not receive as much touch in my life as normal people.

- _____2. I receive a normal, healthy amount of touch from people.
- _____3. Human touch is not a daily occurrence in my life.
- _____4. Touch from other people is a very common and natural part of my daily life.
- _____5. I often go for days without being touched by someone.
- _____6. I often feel like I'm untouchable because of the lack of touch from others in my life.
- _____7. I receive a variety of forms of touch from a variety of different people.
- _____8. I can go long periods of time without being touched by another person.
- _____9. There are days when I would do anything just to be touched by someone.
- _____10. I have longed for the touch of another person, any person.
- _____11. Some days I long to be held, but have no one to hold me.
- _____12. I often wish I could get more hugs from others.
- _____13. I've engaged in sexual behaviors for the pure purpose of being touched by someone.
- _____14. I would never engage in sex with someone, just to be touched.

Scoring:

To compute your scores follow the instructions below:

- Absence of Touch: $18 - (\text{scores for items 2, 4, \& 7}) + (\text{scores for items 1, 3, 5, 6, \& 8})$
- Longing for Touch: Add scores for items 9, 10, 11, \& 12
- Sex for Touch: $6 - (\text{scores for item 14}) + (\text{scores for item 13})$

Absence of Touch Score: _____

Longing for Touch Score: _____

Sex for Touch Score: _____

Interpretation:

For absence of touch, scores should be between 7 and 35. If your score is above 17, you are considered to have an absence of touch. If your score is below 16, then touch is a normal part of your daily life.

For longing for touch, scores should be between 4 and 20. If your score is above 10, you are considered to have a longing for touch in your life. If your score is below 9, then touch is a normal part of your daily life.

For sex for touch, scores should be between 2 and 10. If your score is above 5, you have probably engaged in sexual intimacy as a way of receiving touch in your life. If your score is below 5, then you probably have not in sexual intimacy as a way of receiving touch in your life.

Source:

Punyanunt-Carter, N. M., & Wrench, J. S. (2009). Development and validity testing of a measure of touch deprivation. *Human Communication*, 12, 67-76.

As you can see, Punyanunt-Carter and Wrench found that there are three different factors related to touch deprivation: the absence of touch, longing for touch, and sexual intimacy for touch. First, the absence of touch is the degree to which an individual perceives that touch is not a normal part of their day-to-day interactions. Many people can go days or even weeks without physically having contact with another person. People may surround them on a day-to-day basis at work, but this doesn't mean they can engage in physical contact with others.

Second, there is the longing for touch. It's one thing to realize that touch is not a normal part of your day-to-day interactions, but it's something completely different not to have that touch and desire that touch. For some people, the lack of touch can be psychologically straining because humans inherently have a desire for physical contact. For some people, this lack of physical contact with other humans can be satisfied by having a pet.

Last, some people desire touch so much that they'll engage in sexual activity just to get touched by another human being. Obviously, these types of situations can be risky because they involve sexual contact outside of an intimate relationship. In fact, "hooking up" can be detrimental to someone's psychological well-being.¹¹

In the Punyanunt-Carter and Wrench study, the researchers found that there was a positive relationship between touch deprivation and depression and a negative relationship between touch deprivation and self-esteem. The study also found that those individuals who felt that they did not receive enough touch growing up (tactile nurturance) also reported higher levels of touch deprivation as adults. This is further evidence of the importance of touch for children and adolescents.

Vocalics

In this section, we will discuss vocalics—the study of how vocal qualities, such as timbre, tempo, intensity, and other vocal features, affect communication. Our discussion will begin with vocal characteristics, including timbre, pitch, tempo, rhythm, and intensity.

Timbre

According to Merriam-Webster online dictionary, **timbre** refers to the “quality given to a sound by its overtones: such as the resonance by which the ear recognizes and identifies a voiced speech sound” (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/timbre>). Pitch refers to the frequency

range between the high and low notes. Pitch is not thought of much unless an individual's pitch stands out. For example, if a female's vocal pitch is low, the meaning might be assigned to the low pitch, just as meaning might be attached to a male voice with a high pitch. Also, pitch that is at a higher or lower end of a range will be noticed if there is a momentary or situational change to an individual's pitch that will trigger an assignment of meaning. For example, when children become excited or scared, they may be described as "squealing." The situation will determine whether squealing children are perceived as excited or scared.

Tempo

Tempo refers to the rate at which one speaks. Changes in tempo can reflect emotions such as excitement or anger, physical well-being, or energy level. One of the author's aunts is a brittle diabetic. When talking to her aunt, the author can detect whether the aunt's blood sugar is too low if the aunt is speaking extremely slowly. Rhythm refers to the pattern used when speaking. Unusual speaking rhythms are often imitated. 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 rhythms of Presidents Biden and Trump are easily identifiable and often imitated by comedians.

Intensity

Finally, **intensity** refers to how loudly or softly an individual speaks. Intensity can be tied to emotion. When individuals speak loudly, the increased volume may convey anger, emotional distress, happiness, or heightened excitement. When individuals speak at a lower volume, it may be an effort to diffuse an emotionally intense conversation. Lower volume could also result from sharing bad news, discussing taboo or sensitive topics (i.e., when people whisper "sex" or "she died"), or conveying private information.

Other Vocal Features

Paralanguage

Paralanguage is another term for vocalics and refers to "extra-linguistic" features involved in speaking, such as the characteristics of speech just discussed, pauses and silences, and nonverbal vocalizations.

Pauses and Silences

Pauses and silences are essential components of creating meaning during an interaction. Pauses draw attention to important parts of messages. The "pregnant pause" is an extra-long pause that precedes weighty information. Pauses are a type of silence that is brief, but prolonged silence, such as minutes, hours, or even days, can convey meaning as well. Consider a conversation in which the other person does not respond to you. What meaning is conveyed? Is the individual thinking? Is the

individual hurt, angry, or too shocked to speak? The myriad meanings of silence help emphasize its significance, showing that it is as impactful as verbal communication, if not more so.

Silence is so significant that it is often used in film as a significant effect in forming narratives or in creating characters. It can also be used to create moments. Consider strong characters in films who are relatively silent. Consider how silence or pause is used to build suspense. Pauses and silence are powerful communication tools. Consider the damaging effects of the “silent treatment” in interpersonal relationships and the psychological effects of the “silent treatment” on a child whose parent won’t speak to them. Silence cannot be overlooked.

Disfluencies, Vocal Fillers, or Verbal Surrogates

Disfluencies, vocal fillers, or verbal surrogates are sounds we make as we attempt to fill dead air while we are thinking of what to say next. In the United States, “um” or “uh” are the most commonly used disfluencies. In conversation, these disfluencies may pass unnoticed by both the sender and the receiver, but consider how the recognition of disfluencies increases when listening to a speaker who frequently uses phrases like “uh” or “um” during a speech. When giving a presentation, the speaker may even draw attention to disfluencies by mentioning them directly, and audience members may become distracted by these disfluencies. One of the author’s classmates used to count the number of “ums” used by a particular professor who frequently used “um” when teaching. Though focusing on disfluencies may be common, it is best for the speaker to reduce an excessive amount of disfluencies and for listeners to focus on the meaning rather than the “ums” and “uhs.”

Disfluency vs. Dysfluency

While the terms “*disfluencies*” and “*dysfluencies*” are sometimes used interchangeably in casual contexts, a meaningful distinction exists, particularly in academic and clinical disciplines.

Disfluencies are interruptions in the natural flow of speech that occur in typical communication. These include phenomena such as *um*, *uh*, brief pauses, repetitions, and false starts. Disfluencies are considered a normal aspect of speech production and are present in all speakers as they formulate thoughts, retrieve words, or structure complex ideas. These are typically not problematic unless they occur excessively, impact intelligibility, or interfere with listener comprehension¹².

Dysfluencies, with the prefix *dys-* indicating abnormality or disorder, have traditionally referred to speech interruptions associated with clinical speech disorders, most notably, stuttering. Examples of dysfluencies include sound prolongations, involuntary blocks, and atypical repetitions that differ in frequency, duration, or effort from normal speech disfluencies¹³.

However, it is worth noting that in contemporary speech-language pathology, the term *disfluency* has largely supplanted *dysfluency*, even in disordered speech. For example, clinicians may refer to *stuttering-like disfluencies (SLDs)* or *atypical disfluencies* rather than using the term *dysfluencies*¹⁴. This shift reflects a preference for using neutral and standardized terminology across both typical and atypical speech.

In communication studies and public speaking education, *disfluencies* are the preferred term, as it encompasses the common, non-pathological speech variations that all speakers exhibit¹⁵. When discussing speech disorders, professionals may specify *atypical disfluencies* or use diagnostic terms such as *stuttering* or *cluttering* to distinguish clinical concerns from everyday speech patterns¹⁶.

Kinesics

Kinesics, first coined by Ray Birdwhistell, is the study of how gestures, facial expressions, and eye behavior communicate. Gestures can be considered any visible movement of the body. These movements “stimulate meaning” in the minds of others.

Facial Expressions

Facial expressions are another form of kinesics. Paul Eckman and Wallace V. Friesen asserted that facial expressions are likely to communicate “affect” or liking.¹⁷ Eckman and Friesen present six emotions that are recognized throughout the world. These emotions are often referred to by the acronym S.A.D.F.I.S.H. and include surprise, anger, disgust, fear, interest, sadness, and happiness (Figure 5.4). Facial expressions are particularly effective in conveying emotions. Although not all facial expression is “universally” recognized, people are generally able to interpret facial expressions within a context. We generally consider happiness is indicated by a smile. Smiling, however, might also communicate politeness, a desire to be pleasing, and even fear. If an individual attempts to use a smile to diffuse a volatile interaction where they fear being verbally or physically attacked, then the smile may be an indication of fear. In this case, the smile cannot be accurately interpreted outside of the context.

In a study investigating preferences for facial expressions in relation to the Big Five personality traits, it was found that most participants showed the strongest preferences for faces communicating high levels of agreeableness and extraversion. Individuals who are high in openness prefer a display of all facially communicated Big Five personality traits. In relation to females who report being highly neurotic, they preferred male faces displaying agreeableness and female faces communicating disagreeableness. Male faces communicating openness were preferred by males who were higher in neuroticism. Interestingly, males reporting higher levels of neuroticism had a lower preference for female faces communicating openness.¹⁸ This study underscores the importance of facial expressions in determining who we prefer.



Figure 5.4 SADFISH

Oculesics

Oculesics is the study of how individuals communicate through eye behavior. Eye contact is generally the first form of communication for interactants. Consider what it's like when a stranger speaks to you in a grocery store from behind, with a question such as, "Can you reach the Frosted Flakes for me?" When a general question, such as this, is asked with no eye contact, you may not be aware that the question was intended for you.

Often, when discussing eye behavior, researchers refer to "gaze." Research consistently demonstrates that females gaze at interaction partners more frequently than males.^{19 20 21} Also, gaze has been studied concerning deception. Early research determined the significance of eye contact in the interpretation behavior. When people gaze too long or for too little, there is likely to be a negative interpretation of this behavior.²² However, later researchers acknowledge that there is a much greater range of acceptable "gazing" as influenced by verbal communication.

Gestures

Kinesics serve multiple functions when communicating, such as emblems, illustrators, affect displays, and regulators.

Emblems

Many gestures are **emblems**. You may recall from earlier in the chapter that gestures are clear and unambiguous and have a verbal equivalent in a given culture.²³ Only a handful of emblematic ges-

tures seem to be universal, for example, a shrug of the shoulders to indicate “I don’t know.” Most emblems are culturally determined, and using them in other countries can lead to difficulty. In the United States, some emblematic gestures include the thumb-up-and-out hitchhiking sign, the “Ok” sign made with a circled thumb and index finger, 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.²⁴

Illustrators

While emblems can be used as direct substitutions for words, **illustrators** help emphasize or explain a word. Recall the Smashmouth lyric in All Star: “She was looking kind of dumb with her finger and her thumb in the shape of an L on her forehead.” The “L” gesture is often used to illustrate “loser.”

Affect Displays

Affect displays show feelings and emotions. Consider how music and sports fans show enthusiasm. It is not uncommon to see grown men and women 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 at 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 show listening or a desire to speak. Head nods are used as a sign of listening and often indicate that the speaker should continue speaking.

Proxemics

Proxemics is the study of communication through space. Space as communication was heavily studied by Edward T. Hall,²⁵ and he famously categorized space into four “distances. These distances represent how space is used and by whom (Figure 5.5).

Hall’s first distance is referred to as intimate space and is often referred to as our “personal bubble.” This bubble ranges from 0 to 18 inches from the body. This space is reserved for those with whom we have close personal relationships.

The next distance is referred to as personal space and ranges from 18 inches to 4 feet. You notice that as the distances move further away from the body, the intimacy of interactions decreases. Personal space is used for conversations with friends or family. If you meet a friend at the local coffee shop to catch up on life, you will probably sit between 18 inches and four feet from your friend.

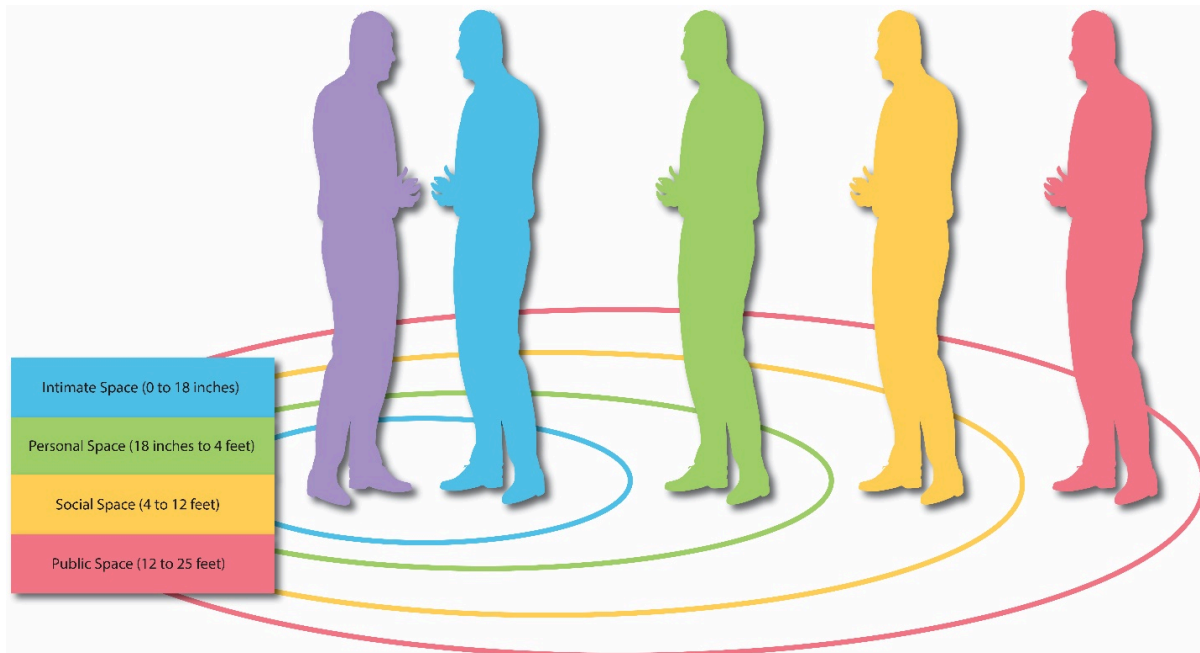


Figure 5.5 Edward T. Hall's Four Spaces

The next distance is “social” distance, ranging from 4 feet to 12 feet. This space is meant for acquaintances.

Finally, the greatest distance is referred to as “public” distance, ranging from 12 feet to 25 feet. In an uncrowded public space, we would not likely approach a stranger any closer than 12 feet. Consider an empty movie theatre. If you enter a theatre with only one other customer, you will not likely sit in the seat directly behind, beside, or in front of this individual. Probably you would sit farther than 12 feet from this individual. However, as the theatre fills, individuals will be forced to sit in Hall’s distances that represent more intimate relationships. How awkward do you feel if you have to sit directly next to a stranger in a theatre?

Artifacts

Artifacts are items with which we adorn our bodies or which we carry with us. Artifacts include glasses, jewelry, canes, shoes, clothing, or any object associated with our body that communicates meaning. One very famous artifact that most everyone can recognize is the glasses of Harry Potter. Harry Potter’s style of glasses has taken on its own meaning. What does his style of eyewear communicate when donned by others? Clothing also stimulates meaning. Do you recall Barney Stinson’s famous line “suit up” in *How I Met Your Mother*? Why was it necessary to suit up? Recently, Snoop Dogg was given a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Snoop Dogg was wearing a beautiful, classic camel-hair overcoat. In contrast, he was wearing large, bulky jewelry. What do these two types of artifacts communicate? One of the authors is a big fan. The author interpreted the classic overcoat as Snoop having excellent taste, and the jewelry as strength and wealth. Together, the artifacts were interpreted as power.

Chronemics

Chronemics, as explained by Thomas J. Bruneau,²⁶ is the use of time to communicate. Time usage is considered culturally bound, with some cultures employing monochronic time and others using polychronic time. Cultures using monochronic time engage in one task at a time. Cultures using polychronic time engage in multiple tasks at the same time. This use of time involves fluidity with individuals feeling free to work on multiple tasks simultaneously rather than completing a task before moving to the next task, as in the monochronic use of time. When considering how time is used, it is essential to consider both individual and cultural preferences. Traditionally, the United States is a monochronic culture, along with Canada or Northern Europe. Korea is an example of a polychronic culture along with Latin America, the Arab part of the Middle East, and Sub-Saharan Africa. However, one can live in each of these cultures and express an orientation toward time that is opposite to the one typically associated with it. One of the authors is admittedly anxious about time. She is highly monochronic. The author attended a conference in Puerto Rico, which represents a polychronic orientation toward time. Buses usually run 30 minutes late, if not longer. Time is more fluid and less incremental in polychronic cultures. Unfortunately, the author failed to take this into account and nearly missed a presentation. This resulted in stress that could have been avoided had she paid more attention to the time orientation of those around her.

Olfactics

Finally, **olfactics** generally refers to the influence of scent on perceptions. Scent can draw others in or repel them, and the same scent can have different impacts on different people. According to Statista.com, the global estimated sales value of fragrances worldwide in 2016 was \$47 billion. This is in addition to \$39 billion in shower and bath products and another \$20.5 billion in deodorants. The total spending in these categories was \$106.5 billion U.S. dollars. These figures underscore the importance of “smelling good” worldwide. Consider the impact of failing to manage one’s natural scent in the workplace. Countless articles in the popular media address how to deal with a “smelly coworker.” Thus, it is crucial to be aware of one’s scent, including the ones we wear in an effort not to offend those around us. Although smelling “bad” may end a relationship or at least create distance, an attractive scent may help individuals begin a new relationship. Have you ever purchased a new scent before a first date? If so, you are aware of the power of scent to attract a mate. Although we regularly try to cover our scent, we also attempt to control the scent of our environments. The air freshener market in 2016 was valued at \$1.62 billion. Visit your local grocery store and examine the variety of products available to enhance environmental scents. Be prepared to spend a significant amount of time taking in the many products to keep our environments “fresh.”²⁷

The amount of money spent on fragrances for the body and home highlights the meaning of scent to humans. Ask yourself the following questions:

1. What meaning do you associate with a floral scent vs. a spicy scent?
2. When comparing men’s fragrances to women’s fragrances, what differences do you notice?
3. Are there scents that immediately transport you back in time, such as the smell of honey-suckle or freshly baked cookies?

Regardless of the scent you prefer, when using scent to communicate positively with others, do not make the mistake of believing the scent you like is loved by those around you!

Physical Appearance

Although not one of the traditional categories of nonverbal communication, we should discuss physical appearance as a form of nonverbal message. Whether we like it or not, our physical appearance affects how people perceive and relate to us. Someone's physical appearance is often one of the first reasons people decide to interact with each other.

Dany Ivy and Sean Wahl argue that physical appearance is a very important factor in nonverbal communication:

The connection between physical appearance and nonverbal communication needs to be made for two important reasons: (1) The decisions we make to maintain or alter our physical appearance reveal a great deal about who we are, and (2) the physical appearance of other people impacts our perception of them, how we communicate with them, how approachable they are, how attractive or unattractive they are, and so on.²⁸

In fact, people ascribe various meanings based on their perceptions of how we physically appear to them. Everything from your height, skin tone, smile, weight, and hair (color, style, lack of, etc.) can communicate meanings to other people. To begin our discussion, we will examine the three somatotypes.

Somatotypes

In the 1940s, psychologist and physician William Herbert Sheldon introduced the idea of somatotypes.²⁹ In Sheldon's theory, there were three overarching body types: the ectomorph, the endomorph, and the mesomorph. To determine where you likely fit within Sheldon's theory, complete the Somatotyping Scale.

Instructions: For each statement, you will have three possible answers; choose the answer that most resembles who you are.

_____1. If you attempt to encircle your right wrist with your left thumb and forefinger:

- a. the two fingers do not touch
- b. the two fingers meet
- c. the two fingers overlap

_____2. My body:

- a. carries too much fat
- b. is lean and muscular

c. is very skinny

_____3. I would say that I am:

- a. chubby
- b. average
- c. very thin

_____4. I tend to be:

- a. very inactive (sedentary)
- b. fairly active
- c. hyperactive

_____5. I tend to:

- a. overeat
- b. eat a normal amount
- c. eat anything I want and not gain weight

_____6. When I go to a gym:

- a. I am heavier than the people there
- b. I look like the people there
- c. I am much smaller than the people there

_____7. With regards to gaining weight:

- a. I am always trying to lose weight
- b. I can gain and lose weight, but tend to stay around the same weight
- c. I can't gain weight

_____8. Strangers have told me that I should:

- a. lose weight
- b. stay the same, I look good
- c. gain weight

_____9. I think my metabolism is:

- a. too slow
- b. just right
- c. too fast

_____10. My bone structure is:

- a. very large
- b. large to medium
- c. small to frail

(A) Endomorphy	(B) Mesomorphy	(C) Ectomorphy

Now, the Somatotyping Scale is based on the general traits that the three different somatotypes possess. Most people are more familiar with their physical looks (Figure 5.6).

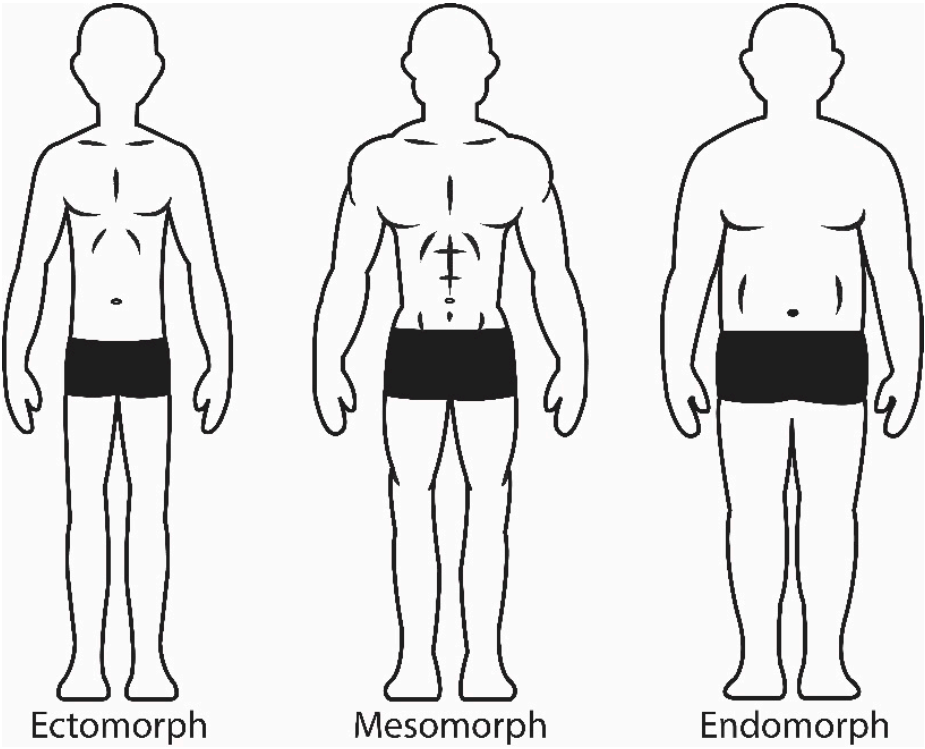


Figure 5.6 Sheldon's Somatotypes

Now, you may wonder to yourself, where did these three terms come from in the first place? Well, Sheldon created these terms from the three germ layers (three primary cell layers) of embryonic development:

- Endoderm (inner layer)—develops into the gastrointestinal tract
- Mesoderm (middle layer)—develops into the cardiovascular and muscular systems
- Ectoderm (outer layer)—develops into the skin and the nervous system

In Sheldon's original theory, the different somatotypes also possessed unique personality traits. Table 5.1 contains the Somatotype Perception Scale. Take a second to complete the measure.

Table 5.1 Somatotype Perception Scale Instructions: For each row of personality descriptors, select the adjective that you think most represents you as a person.

1. Quiet	Strong	Best friend
2. Worrisome	Fights	Kind
3. Lonely	Cheats	Happy
4. Sneaky	Argues	Helps others
5. Afraid	Gets teased	Polite
6. Sad	Sick	Brave
7. Tired	Lazy	Good looking
8. Weak	Sloppy	Extraverted
9. Kind	Naughty	Brave
10. Nervous	Mean	Assumes leadership
11. Low pain tolerance	Dirty	Aggressive
12. Introverted	Tired	Athletic
13. Intelligent	Lies	High pain threshold
14. Caring	Poor athlete	Immodest
15. Tense	Humorous	Energetic

Add the number of personality descriptors circled in each column separately.

Ectomorphy	Endomorphy	Mesomorphy

The Somatotype Perception Scale is, in fact, a set of stereotypes that some people have associated with the three different body types.³⁰ However, the media often still portrays these stereotypes on television and in movies. As such, many people still hold these stereotypes.

Physical Appearance and Society

Unfortunately, someone's physical appearance has been shown to affect their lives in several ways:

- Physically attractive students are viewed as more popular by their peers.
- Physically attractive people are seen as smarter.
- Physically attractive job applicants are more likely to get hired.
- Physically attractive people make more money.
- Physically attractive journalists are seen as more likable and credible.
- Physically attractive defendants in a court case were less likely to be convicted, and if they were convicted, the juries recommended less harsh sentences.
- Taller people are perceived as more credible.
- People who are overweight are less likely to get job interviews or promotions.

Now, this list is far from perfect and doesn't account for every scenario. There are some differences between females and males in how they perceive attraction and how they are influenced by attraction. Moreover, culture can play a large part in how physical attractiveness impacts people's perceptions. For example, the classic example of how culture determines what is considered physi-

cally attractive stems from the paintings of Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), who is famous for his use of full-figured women as a depiction of physical ideals (see Figure 5.7).

In the United States today, most females and males who are portrayed in leading roles fall into the mesomorphic somatotype. There are examples of ectomorphic and endomorphic leading players, but the majority of people on television shows and in films are typically portrayed by those who are mesomorphic. In fact, these trends are seen in all of our major media in the United States (e.g., news, magazines, comic books, live theatre, etc.).

Body Positivity

There are groups in the United States that are attempting to help break down these walls within our society. For example, over the past few years, a movement known as body positivity has emerged. In reality, the idea of body positivity isn't that new. In 1996, Connie Sobczak and Elizabeth Scott founded [The Body Positive](#). In her 2014 book, *embody: Learning to Love Your Unique Body (And Quiet that Critical Voice)*, Connie Sobczak defined body positive as “a way of living that gives you permission to love, care for, and take pleasure in your body throughout your lifespan. Struggles will inevitably occur, especially during times of transition or imbalance.”³¹ Sobczak goes on to note that practicing body positivity “allows you to find what you need to live with as much self-love and balanced self-care as possible. Experiences of conflict and suffering become opportunities to learn what is required to further your growth so you can find greater contentment and peace.”³² The Body Positive has created a basic model for body positivity that consists of five basic competencies: reclaim health, practice intuitive self-care, cultivate self-love, declare your authentic beauty, and build community (Figure 5.8).

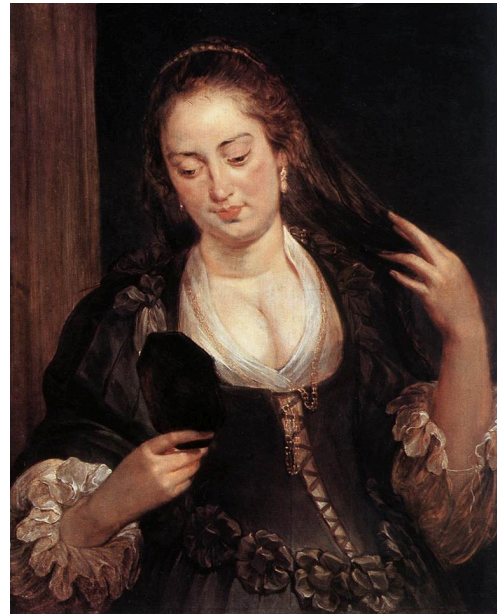


Figure 5.7. The Rubenesque Woman. [Woman with a Mirror by Peter Paul Rubens](#)

Reclaim Health

The first competency of the Be Body Positive Model is reclaiming one's health. For too long, the health care industry has consistently used someone's body mass index as an indication of a person's physical health. However, there is ample research that “measurements of physical activity and metabolic fitness, such as blood pressure, blood lipids, and blood sugar levels, are far better indicators of physical health than body size.”³³ As such, reclaiming one's health is realizing that the weight loss and diet industry is a profit-making machine that isn't very effective. The weight loss and diet industry is estimated to be worth \$245.51 billion by 2022.³⁴ People spend a ton of money here even though the long-term effects of dieting are abysmal, with most people gaining back the weight they lost and adding some.^{35 36}



Figure 5.8 Five Competencies of the Be Body Positive Model

Now, this is not to say that people who are unhealthy should relish their ill-health. Instead, body positivity is about understanding that health isn't a number. One number that is often used to declare someone's "health" is their body mass index. You can calculate your own BMI using this [calculator from the National Institutes of Health](#). Here are the general categories associated with explaining someone's BMI:

- Underweight = <18.5
- Normal weight = 18.5–24.9
- Overweight = 25–29.9
- Obesity = 30–39
- Morbid Obesity = 40+

In reality, BMI doesn't distinguish between fat and muscle, so many elite bodybuilders have BMIs that say they're obese when they have little to no body fat. It's even possible to have metabolically healthy obesity. According to Patrick J. Skerrett, Former Executive Editor of *Harvard Health*, metabolically healthy obesity includes the following factors:

- a waist size of no more than 40 inches for a man or 35 inches for a woman
- normal blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar
- normal sensitivity to insulin
- good physical fitness³⁸

As such, the focus of reclaiming health isn't about a number on a scale, but about being healthy. Unfortunately, many people still have the stereotype in society associating fatness with sickness, which modern medicine knows isn't the case.

In 2006, Milan, Italy known for its fashion shows, signed a regulation that models must have a minimum BMI of 18 following the death of 2 models whose BMIs were 14.5 and 13.4.³⁷

Practice Intuitive Self-Care

Intuitive care is learning to trust our bodies regarding both eating and exercise. It's about being attuned to our bodies and realizing what they need. It's not about limiting yourself to 800 calories a day or exercising for nine hours every day. Instead, it's about learning to listen to our bodies mindfully. Intuitive self-care realizes that our bodies need food and exercise, so we need to listen to them and provide them what they need. At the same time, intuitive self-care recognizes that this will look different for everyone. There is no perfect diet or exercise routine that will be beneficial for everyone. Some people experience a "runner's high," while others never feel that euphoric sensation runners often discuss. Other people can easily pack on muscle, while others can spend hours in the gym and still not see the type of growth they desire. Essentially, our bodies are unique and have inherent limitations on what they can accomplish. When people have unrealistic expectations for what their body can (and should) look like and what their body can achieve, they are considered to have body dysmorphia. Before progressing further, take a moment and complete The Body Dysmorphia Short Form.

The Body Dysmorphia Short Form

Instructions: Please read each sentence carefully and indicate the extent to which you agree with each statement. Please use the scale below to rate the degree to which each statement applies to you.

Never True	Rarely True	Sometimes True	Often True	Almost Always True
1	2	3	4	5

_____1. I often avoid having all or part of my body seen by others.

_____2. My sex life has not been affected by concerns related to my physical appearance.

_____3. I have avoided being seen by others because of my concerns related to my physical appearance.

_____4. I do not worry that my body isn't sufficiently lean or muscular.

_____5. I am comfortable showing my body in public situations.

_____6. I often eat alone because I don't want people to know how much or how little I am eating.

_____7. My self-esteem is not influenced by my weight.

_____8. I worry a lot about how I look.

_____9. I am generally not self-conscious of how I look when I am around others.

_____10. When people tell me that I look good, I generally think they are lying.

Scoring:

To compute your scores follow the instructions below:

30 – (scores for items 1, 3, 6, 8, & 10) + scores for items (2, 4, 5, 7, & 9)

Body Dysmorphia Score: _____

Interpretation:

The average score for females on this measure is 27.64, so scores above 27.64 (25.66 for males) are high and indicate a higher degree of body dysmorphia, while those below 27.64 (25.66 for males) are lower degrees of body dysmorphia. This is a research measure and not a diagnostic one. If you think you may be someone suffering from body dysmorphia, we would highly encourage you to seek out help from a mental health professional who specializes in the care and treatment of body dysmorphia.

Source:

Wrench, J. S. (2001). *Intercultural communication: Power in context*. Tapestry Press.

Cultivate Self-Love

As we've discussed with mindfulness throughout this text, one of the problems many people face is an overly critical brain that seems to run nonstop. Cultivating self-love is about learning to make life-affirming choices and not listening to the nonstop vulture sitting on our shoulders. Many of the practices we've discussed in relation to mindfulness align with the idea of cultivating self-love.

Declare Your Authentic Beauty

Everyone is beautiful. Yet, we live in a society that places premium on certain types of physical attributes that get labeled “physically attractive” or “beautiful.” Declaring your authentic beauty is about:

choosing to see and express ourselves just as we are—internal and external qualities combined. Exploring beauty through a body positive lens teaches us to have a dynamic, engaged relationship with the world around us. We honor our bodies as we pass through each developmental stage of life, which leads to true self-care because we don't confuse it with a desire to transform our physical selves to meet someone else's definition of beauty.⁴⁰

Stanley's Five Mantra's for Self-Love³⁹

- Your light is necessary in this world.
- Your existence is proof of your survival and strength.
- You have something to offer the world that no one else does.
- You're not a bad person for hating your-

Now, we do not deny that we are bombarded by messages in our society that dictate beauty standards, and it's hard to avoid these images and not let them affect how we evaluate our physical appearance. Learning to declare your authentic beauty is a process and not a process that's going to happen overnight. Instead, it's essential to identify and label those culture statements when we encounter them. The more we recognize these culture statements, the easier it will be to acknowledge our beauty.

self.

- Everything your body has been through is an opportunity for growth.

Build Community

The last competency in the Be Body Positive Model is building a community of like-minded people who seek to build each other up instead of tearing each other down. Many colleges and universities even have Be Body Positive groups on campus to help support one another as we all learn to be more body positive.

Mindfulness Activity

For this activity, we want you to think through the Be Body Positive Model within your own life. Answer the following questions:

1. How has the health care system failed you regarding reclaiming your health? How can you take control and reclaim your health? What obstacles do you have in front of you? How can you overcome them?
2. How can you approach food and exercise from a position of self-care? Do you think you can do this now? Why? If not, what is preventing you from thinking about food and exercise from this approach?
3. When was the last time you had a critical thought about your physical appearance? How did you respond to that thought? Was it from a position of self-love? If not, how could you have cultivated self-love in that moment?
4. What are the five things that make you beautiful?
5. Do you have a group of people in your life who celebrate being body positive? If not, how could you go about creating this circle for yourself?



The Matching Hypothesis

One obvious area where physical appearance plays a huge part in our day-to-day lives is in our romantic relationships. Elaine Walster and her colleagues coined the “matching hypothesis” back in the 1960s.^{41 42} The basic premise of the matching hypothesis is that the idea of “opposites attract-

ing” really doesn’t pertain to physical attraction. When all else is equal, people are more likely to find themselves in romantic relationships with people who are perceived as similarly physically attractive.

In a classic study conducted by Shepherd and Ellis, the researchers took pictures of married couples and mixed up the images of the husbands and wives.^{43 44} Researchers then had groups of female and male college students sort the images based on physical attraction. Not surprisingly, a positive relationship was found between the physical attractiveness of the husbands and that of the wives.

Other physical appearance variables beyond basic physical attractiveness have also been examined in relation to the matching hypothesis. A group of researchers led by Julie Carmalt found that matching also explained the dating habits of young people. In their study, Carmalt et al. found that individuals who were overweight were less likely to date someone physically attractive.⁴⁵

Overall, research supports the matching hypothesis; however, physical attractiveness is not the only variable that can influence romantic partners (e.g., socioeconomic status, education, career prospects, etc.). However, the matching hypothesis is a factor that affects many people’s ultimate ability to make a good dating selection.

Research Spotlight



In 2024, Kaitlyn T. Harper and colleagues conducted a large-scale speed-dating study to examine how individuals use self-assessments of their attractiveness to guide their mate choices and whether accurate self-perceptions lead to better dating outcomes.⁴⁶

The study involved 1,354 first-year psychology students who participated in speed-dating sessions where they rated themselves and potential partners on mate value and indicated their willingness to date each person they met. The researchers were particularly interested in testing social exchange theory and the matching hypothesis—the idea that people tend to pair with partners of similar attractiveness levels.

The results provided strong support for the matching hypothesis. Participants’ self-perceived mate value significantly predicted their minimum, mean, and maximum standards for potential partners. Individuals who rated themselves as more attractive were more willing to accept partners with higher minimum attractiveness levels and aimed for dates with higher overall mate value. However, self-perceived mate value did not affect how many partners participants were interested in dating, suggesting that people adjust their standards rather than becoming generally more or less selective. Participants were somewhat accurate in their self-evaluations, with self-perceived mate value being positively correlated with how others rated them, though this correlation was relatively weak.

When examining self-enhancement effects, the researchers found that participants who overestimated their mate value were not more successful at attracting interest from poten-

tial partners compared to those who underestimated themselves. However, the overestimators were choosier and said “yes” to fewer potential partners. This choosiness ultimately worked against them: while overestimators and underestimators received similar amounts of interest from others, the overestimators ended up with fewer actual matches because they were more selective. The study also revealed gender differences consistent with evolutionary theories, with females being generally choosier than males and showing stronger effects of self-perceived mate value on partner standards. These findings demonstrate that accurate self-assessment, rather than self-enhancement, leads to more successful mating outcomes.

Key Takeaways

- Nonverbal communication is not a single behavior but a collection of categories, each of which contributes uniquely to how messages are interpreted.
- The major categories of nonverbal communication include:
 - Kinesics – Body movement, including gestures, posture, and facial expressions
 - Oculistics – Eye behavior such as eye contact, gaze, and blinking
 - Haptics – Use of touch to convey messages, emotions, or relationships
 - Vocalics (Paralanguage) – Vocal elements like tone, pitch, volume, and speaking rate
 - Proxemics – Use of personal space and physical distance in communication
 - Chronemics – Use of time, including punctuality and response time
 - Physical Appearance – Clothing, grooming, and general attractiveness
 - Artifacts – Personal objects or adornments used to convey identity or affiliation
 - Environment – The physical surroundings, including layout, lighting, and design
- Each category of nonverbal communication influences how messages are received and interpreted, whether by reinforcing, contradicting, or substituting for verbal language.
- Understanding these categories helps communicators become more intentional and accurate in both sending and interpreting nonverbal cues.
- Many nonverbal behaviors overlap across categories, so it's essential to consider context and the combination of cues to fully grasp their meaning.

Exercises

1. List and define the categories of nonverbal communication. For each category, make a list of corresponding nonverbal behaviors that are discussed in this chapter and add to this list from your own experiences.
2. Recall a situation in which you interacted with someone whose nonverbal behaviors stood out for positive reasons. Describe the situation and nonverbal behaviors. Why do you consider nonverbal behaviors to be positive?
3. Recall a situation in which you interacted with an individual whose nonverbal behaviors detracted from the individual's ability to communicate effectively. Describe these nonverbal behaviors and suggest what the individual could do differently.
4. Consider a movie where silence was used strategically as part of the story narrative or consider a movie character whose silence gave them a depth that they would not have otherwise had. How was silence used specifically?

Improving your Nonverbal Skills

Learning Objectives

1. Identify areas of nonverbal communication that can be observed and improved.
2. Explain the importance of developing a nonverbal communication mindset.
3. Describe the role of observation in analyzing and modeling nonverbal behaviors.
4. Define nonverbal immediacy and explain its impact on communication.
5. Illustrate how nonverbal skills can be strengthened through practice.

In this chapter, we've examined a wide range of issues related to nonverbal communication. But it's one thing to understand nonverbal communication and something completely different to communicate using nonverbal behaviors effectively. In this section, we're going to explore some ways that you can start to improve your nonverbal skills.

The Nonverbal Mindset

When it comes to effective communication, you need to develop an appropriate mindset toward nonverbal communication. First, individuals must be aware that nonverbal communication plays a significant role in creating meaning.

Second, individuals must believe nonverbal communication is important and impactful. Being aware of nonverbal communication without recognizing its importance can lead to negative outcomes. For example, students in nonverbal communication begin to learn about the importance of clothing and general appearance in creating a positive impression. Some students “rebel” against the idea that appearance and clothing matter, stating, “people should accept me no matter what I am wearing.” While this would be ideal, the fact of the matter is that humans size up other humans using visual cues in initial interactions.

Lastly, individuals can analyze their nonverbal communication. This can be accomplished in several ways. Individuals might observe the behavior of individuals who seem to be liked by others and to whom others are socially attracted. The individual should then compare the behaviors of the “popular” person to their behaviors. What differences exist? Does the other individual smile more, make more or less eye contact, engage in more or less touch, etc.? Based on this comparison, individuals can devise a plan for improvement or perhaps no improvement is needed!

Nonverbal Immediacy

Besides awareness of nonverbal communication, believing that nonverbal communication is important and analyzing one’s behavior, individuals should be aware of nonverbal immediacy. **Immediacy** is defined as physical and psychological closeness. More specifically, Mehrabian defines immediacy as behaviors increasing the sensory stimulation between individuals.⁴⁷ Immediacy behaviors include being physically oriented toward another, eye contact, some touch, gesturing, vocal variety, and talking louder. Immediacy behaviors are known to have a significant impact in various contexts.

In instructional, organizational, and social contexts, research has revealed powerful positive impacts because of immediacy behaviors, including influence and compliance, liking, relationship satisfaction, job satisfaction, and learning, etc. In the health care setting, the positive outcomes of nonverbally immediate interaction are well documented: patient satisfaction,^{48 49} understanding of medical information,^{50 51} patient perceptions of provider credibility,⁵² patient perceptions of confidentiality,⁵³ parent recall of medical directives given by pediatricians and associated cognitive learning,⁵⁴ affect for the provider,^{55 56} and decreased apprehension when communicating with a physician.⁵⁷ Individuals can increase their immediacy behaviors through practice!

Research Spotlight



In 2022, Oleksandra Romaniuk and Larissa Terán conducted a content analysis of reality dating shows to examine how gender influences the verbal and nonverbal immediacy behaviors people use to make first impressions in romantic encounters.⁵⁸ The researchers analyzed 331 couples from *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* (2012-2019), coding their approximately 30-second initial interactions for verbal immediacy cues like compliments, intrigue, and relationship continuation statements, as well as nonverbal immediacy cues such as head tilts, eye gaze patterns, and touching behaviors. While men and women showed more similarities than differences overall, significant gender patterns emerged: men were more likely to outline the probability of relationship development and pay compliments. In contrast, women were more prone to using intrigue to arouse curiosity and interest. For nonverbal behavior, women were significantly more likely to use submissive gestures, such as head tilts, shoulder shrugs, and specific gaze patterns. At the same time, men were more likely to engage in clothes straightening. These findings suggest that reality dating shows may reinforce traditional gender roles and sexual scripts, potentially serving as cultural guides that influence how viewers approach their romantic first impressions in real life.

Key Takeaways

- Voice, body movement, eye contact, and facial expression are key areas of nonverbal communication that can be assessed and improved to enhance message clarity and relational impact.
- A strong nonverbal communication mindset involves recognizing the significance of nonverbal behaviors and acknowledging their impact on first impressions, relationships, and social perception.
- Observing effective communicators and comparing their behavior to your own can help identify areas for growth, such as smiling more, maintaining better posture, or improving eye contact.
- Nonverbal immediacy refers to behaviors that promote physical and psychological closeness, such as:
 - Facing others directly
 - Using vocal variety and appropriate volume

- Engaging in eye contact
- Incorporating meaningful gestures
- Using touch when appropriate

These behaviors can enhance influence, satisfaction, credibility, and learning in both personal and professional contexts.

- Like any skill, nonverbal communication improves with intentional effort and repeated practice, similar to learning to play an instrument or preparing a recipe.

Exercises

1. Record your voice and listen to the recording several times. Use the questions included in the “Analyze Your Voice” section of this chapter. Make a note of the areas where you believe you are doing well and areas where you may need improvement. Ask a friend to listen to your voice and respond to the question for additional feedback.
2. Video record a conversation between you and a friend or friend/s. (Make sure everyone approves of being recorded.) As a group, review your facial expressions, body movements, and gestures. Discuss your nonverbal behavior as a group, being certain to compliment areas of success and ask for constructive feedback if you are comfortable doing so.
3. Select a nonverbal specific behavior, such as greeting through a wave or eye contact. Use this nonverbal behavior in a manner that is inconsistent with the accepted use of this nonverbal behavior. For example, avoid eye contact completely with a friend or kiss a friend on the cheek instead of simply saying hello. Make a note of your reaction and the reaction of your friend. (Be prepared to explain your behavior to your friend.)
4. Take an inventory of your nonverbal communication skills by answering the following questions. Do you believe nonverbal communication is important? Why or why not? Which subcategories of nonverbal communication are your strengths and areas for growth? How can you improve these areas for growth?

Key Terms

accent

affect displays

attribution error

complement

contradict	paralanguage
dysfluencies	pitch
emblems	proxemics
eye gaze	regulate
haptics	regulators
illustrators	repeat
inflection	rhythm
intensity	substitute
kinesics	tempo
nonverbal vocalization	timbre
oculesics	verbal surrogates
olfactics	vocalics

Chapter Wrap-Up

In this chapter, we discussed the importance of nonverbal communication. To be an effective nonverbal communicator, it is essential to recognize that nonverbal communication conveys a significant amount of information. However, the meaning of nonverbal communication most often must be understood within the context of the interaction. There are very few nonverbal behaviors that can be understood outside of context.

This chapter also discusses the functions of nonverbal communication. Nonverbal communication serves multiple purposes and helps clarify the meaning of verbal communication. Verbal and nonverbal communication, when combined, increase the likelihood of conveying accurate meaning to others. One without the other dilutes the effectiveness of each.

Finally, this chapter discusses the subcategories of nonverbal communication. The subcategories of nonverbal communication allow us to account for the multitude of cues sent between the sender and receiver. The human brain must account for cues resulting from eye contact, facial expressions, distance between sender and receiver, touch, sound, movement, and scent. Amazingly, the human brain processes all these cues quickly and with high accuracy.

Chapter Exercises

Real-World Case Study

Addie was assigned a roommate for her freshman year in college. Addie noticed her roommate made little eye contact, avoided touch, and didn't smile very often. After a few weeks, Addie noticed her roommate looked at her more when talking and smiled when she entered the room. Meanwhile, Addie made friends in some of her classes and invited them to her room to study. Addie's roommate didn't look at anyone and didn't smile. Addie's friends complained that her roommate didn't like them and that she was a little strange.

What information might Addie provide to her friends to give them insight into Addie's behavior?

The roommate's nonverbal behavior may have consequences for her in social settings. Is it her responsibility to adapt her nonverbal communication, or the responsibility of those around her to understand that she is simply different?

End-of-Chapter Assessment

1. If Mary stomps her foot while saying, "No, I won't go with you." Which function of nonverbal communication is she using?
 - a. Complementing
 - b. Accenting
 - c. Repeating
 - d. Contradicting
 - e. Substituting
2. Ronnie says "ummm" frequently when speaking. This aspect of vocalics is referred to as _____.
 - a. Pitch
 - b. Rate
 - c. Disfluency
 - d. Disconnection
 - e. Pause
3. Choose the best example of an emblem.
 - a. Using two fingers in the shape of a V to sign "Peace"
 - b. Shaking of the head to say no
 - c. Pointing in the air while saying up
 - d. Rubbing your stomach while saying yum
 - e. Making a cradle with the arms when saying baby
4. What is the difference in the repeating function of nonverbal communication and the complementing function of nonverbal communication?
 - a. Complementing nonverbal behavior can stand alone, whereas repeating cannot.
 - b. Repeating nonverbal communication can stand alone, whereas complementing can-

- not.
 - c. Repeating behaviors are more useful than complementing nonverbal communication.
 - d. There is no difference between complementing and repeating nonverbal behavior.
 - e. Repeating behaviors are more culturally appropriate in the United States
5. Which function of nonverbal communication is best represented when the nonverbal behavior is the opposite of verbal communication?
- a. Complementing
 - b. Repeating
 - c. Accenting
 - d. Substituting
 - e. Contradicting
6. _____ is the study of how use of space communicates.
- a. Haptics
 - b. Oculistics
 - c. Chronemics
 - d. Proxemics
 - e. Kinesics
7. _____ is the study of how touch communicates.
- a. Haptics
 - b. Oculistics
 - c. Chronemics
 - d. Proxemics
 - e. Kinesics
8. If Lacey is standing within 18 inches of her friend, she is standing in which of Hall's distances?
- a. Personal
 - b. Intimate
 - c. Social
 - d. Public
 - e. Parallel

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Chapter 6: Cultural and Environmental Factors in Interpersonal Communication



“A group of Mexican woman wearing traditional clothing” by [Camila Blando](#) on [Unsplash](#)

One of the most important factors in our understanding of communication is culture. Each of us has grown up in a unique cultural environment, and this culture has shaped how we communicate. Culture is so ingrained in who we are that we often don’t even recognize our own culture. In this chapter, we will explore culture and its impact on interpersonal communication.

What is Culture?

Learning Objectives

1. Define the term *culture* as used in communication studies.
2. Describe how culture influences beliefs, values, norms, rules, and behaviors.
3. Differentiate between dominant cultures, co-cultures, and microcultures.
4. Identify examples of co-cultural and microcultural groups in everyday life.

5. Explain how cultural learning shapes individuals' worldviews and practices.

When people hear the word “culture,” many images often come to mind. Perhaps you immediately think of attending the ballet, an opera, or an art museum. Other people think of traditional dress like that seen from Mexico in the picture at the top of the chapter. However, the word “culture” has a wide range of meanings for many people. For example, when you travel to a new country (or even a state within your own country), you expect to encounter different clothing, languages, foods, rituals, etc. The term “culture” is a highly debated concept among academics. In 1952, A. L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn compiled a list of 164 definitions for the word “culture.” Culture is often described as “the way we do things.”¹ In their book, the authors noted, “Considering that concept [of culture] has had a name for less than 80 years, it is not surprising that full agreement and precision has not yet been attained.”² Kroeber and Kluckhohn predicted that eventually, science would land on a singular definition of culture as it was refined through the scientific process. Unfortunately, the idea of a single definition of culture is no closer to becoming a reality today than it was in 1952.³

For our purposes, we are going to talk about **culture** as “a group of people who through a process of learning are able to share perceptions of the world which influences their beliefs, values, norms, and rules, which eventually affect behavior.”⁴ Let’s break down this definition. First, when we talk about “culture,” we are starting off with a group of people. One of the biggest misunderstandings that newcomers to cultural studies have is that an individual can have their own personalized culture. Culture is something that is formed by the groups with which we grow up and are involved throughout our lives.

Second, we learn about our culture. In fact, culture becomes so ingrained in who we are that we often fail to recognize our own culture and its daily impact on us. Just like language, everyone is hardwired to learn culture. The culture we pick up is ultimately a matter of the group(s) we are born into and raised in. Just like a baby born to an English-speaking family isn’t going to magically start speaking French out of nowhere, neither will a person from one culture accidentally adopt another culture.

Third, what we learn ultimately leads to a shared perception of the world. All cultures have stories that are taught to children that impact how they view the world. If you are raised by Jewish or Christian parents/guardians, you will learn the creation story in the Bible. However, this is only one of many creation myths that have abounded over time in different cultures:

- The Akamba in Kenya say that the first two people were lowered to earth by God on a cloud.
- In ancient Babylon and Sumeria, the gods slaughtered another god named We-ila, and out of his blood and clay, they formed humans.
- One myth among the Tibetan people is that they owe their existence to the union of an ogress, not of this world, and a monkey on Gangpo Ri Mountain at Tsetang.
- The Aboriginal tribes in Australia believe that humans are the descendants of gods.⁵

Ultimately, which creation story we grew up with was a matter of the culture in which we were raised. These different myths lead to very different views of the individual's relationship with both the world and with their God, gods, or goddesses.

Fourth, the culture in which we are raised teaches us our beliefs, values, norms, and rules. **Beliefs** are assumptions and convictions held by an individual, group, or culture about the truth or existence of something. For example, in all of the creation myths discussed in the previous paragraph, these are beliefs that were held by many people at various times in human history. Next, we have **values**, which are essential and lasting principles or standards held by a culture regarding desirable and appropriate courses of action or outcomes. This definition is a bit complex, so let's break it down. When looking at this definition, it's important first to highlight that different cultures have different perceptions related to both courses of action or outcomes. For example, in many cultures throughout history, martyrdom (dying for one's cause) has been something deeply valued. As such, in those cultures, putting oneself self in harm's way (course of action) or dying (outcome) would be seen as both desirable and appropriate. Within a given culture, there are guiding principles and standards that help determine what is desirable and appropriate. In fact, many religious texts describe martyrdom as a holy calling. Within these cultures, martyrdom is highly valued. Next, within the definition of culture are the concepts of norms and rules. **Norms** are informal guidelines about what is acceptable or proper social behavior within a specific culture. **Rules** are the explicit guidelines (generally written) that govern acceptable or proper social behavior within a specific culture. With rules, we have clearly concrete and explicitly communicated ways of behaving, whereas norms are not concrete, nor are they explicitly communicated. We rarely know a norm exists within a given culture unless we violate the norm or watch someone else violating the norm. The final part of the definition of culture, and probably the most important for our purposes, particularly in the context of interpersonal communication, is that these beliefs, values, norms, and rules govern how people behave.

Co-cultures

Besides a dominant culture, most societies have various **co-cultures**—regional, economic, social, religious, ethnic, and other cultural groups that exert influence in society. Other co-cultures develop among people who share specific beliefs, ideologies, or life experiences. For example, within the United States we commonly refer to a wide variety of different cultures: Amish culture, African American culture, Buddhist Culture, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersexed, asexual, and two-spirited (LGBTQIA2S+) culture. With all these different cultural groups, we realize that just because individuals belong to a cultural group, that does not mean that they are all identical. For example, African Americans in New York City are culturally distinct from those living in Birmingham, Alabama, because they also belong to different geographical co-cultures. Within the LGBTQIA2S+ culture, the members who comprise the different letters can have a wide range of diverse cultural experiences within the larger community itself. As such, we must always be careful to avoid generalizing about individuals because of the co-cultures they belong to.

Co-cultures bring their unique sense of history and purpose within a larger culture. Co-cultures will also have their holidays and traditions. For example, one popular co-cultural holiday celebrated in the United States is Cinco de Mayo. Many U.S. citizens think that Cinco de Mayo is a Mexican

holiday. However, this is not a Mexican holiday. Outside of Puebla, Mexico, it's considered a relatively minor holiday even though children do get the day off from school. One big mistake many U.S. citizens make is assuming *Cinco de Mayo* is Mexican Independence Day, which it is not. Instead, *El Grito de la Independencia* (The Cry of Independence) is held annually on September 16 in honor of Mexican Independence from Spain in 1810. Sadly, *Cinco de Mayo* has become more of an American holiday than it is a Mexican one. Just as an FYI, *Cinco de Mayo* is the date (May 5, 1862) observed to commemorate the Mexican Army's victory over the French Empire at the Battle of Puebla that conclude the Franco-Mexican War (also referred to as the Battle of Puebla Day). We raise this example because the larger culture often co-opts parts of a co-culture and attempts to adapt it into the mainstream. During this process, the meaning associated with the co-culture is often twisted or forgotten. If you need another example, think of St. Patrick's Day, which evolved from a religious celebration marking the death of St. Patrick on March 17, 461 CE, to a day when "everyone's Irish" and drinks green beer.

Microcultures

The last major term we need to explain regarding culture is microculture. A **microculture**, sometimes called a local culture, refers to cultural patterns of behavior influenced by cultural beliefs, values, norms, and rules based on a specific locality or within an organization. "Members of a microculture will usually share much of what they know with everyone in the greater society but will possess a special cultural knowledge that is unique to the subgroup."⁶ If you're a college student and you've ever lived in a dorm, you may have experienced what we mean by a microculture. It's not uncommon for different dorms on campus to develop their own unique cultures that are distinct from other dorms. They may have their own exclusive stories, histories, mascots, and specializations. Perhaps you live in a dorm that caters to honors students or pairs U.S. students with international students. Perhaps you live in a dorm that is allegedly haunted. Maybe you live in a dorm that values competition against other dorms on campus, or one that doesn't care about the competition at all. All these examples help individual dorms develop unique cultural identities.

We often refer to microcultures as "local cultures" because they do tend to exist among a small segment of people within a specific geographical location. There's considerable research on the topic of classrooms as microcultures. Depending on the students and the teacher, you could end up with radically different classroom environments, even if the content is the same. The importance of microcultures stems from Abraham Maslow's concept of the need for belonging. We all feel the need to belong, and these microcultures give us that sense of belonging on a more localized level.

For this reason, we also often examine microcultures that can exist within organizational settings. One common microculture that has been discussed and researched is the Disney microculture. Employees (oops! We mean cast members) who work for the Disney company quickly realize that there is more to working at Disney than a uniform and a name badge. Disney cast members do not wear uniforms; everyone is in costume. When a Disney cast member is interacting with the public, then they are "on stage;" when a cast member is on a break away from the public eye, then they are "backstage." From the moment a Disney cast member is hired, they are required to take Traditions One and probably Traditions Two at Disney University, which is run by the Disney Institute

(<http://disneyinstitute.com/>). Here is how Disney explains the purpose of Traditions: “Disney Traditions is your first day of work filled with the History & Heritage of The Walt Disney Company, and a sprinkle of pixie dust!”⁷ As you can tell from the very beginning of the Disney cast member experience, Disney attempts to create a very specific microculture that is based on all things Disney.

Key Takeaways

- Culture is defined as a group of people who, through learning, share perceptions of the world that shape their beliefs, values, norms, and rules—and ultimately, their behaviors.
- Cultural knowledge is learned rather than innate, and the culture a person adopts depends on the groups into which they are born or raised.
- Cultural worldviews are shaped by shared narratives—such as origin myths, religious teachings, and social customs—that guide how individuals interact with the world and one another.
- Within any society, there is a dominant culture, which includes the shared language, values, and traditions of the majority or most powerful group.
- Societies also contain co-cultures, which are regional, ethnic, social, or ideological groups that share distinct traditions and perspectives—e.g., LGBTQIA+ culture or African American culture.
- Microcultures, also known as local cultures, are smaller cultural groups that form within organizations, dorms, or classrooms. These groups share distinct behaviors, stories, and identities that may differ from the broader culture, such as those found among Disney cast members or residence hall communities.

Exercises

1. Think about your own dominant culture. What does it mean to be a member of your national culture? What are the established language, religion, behavior, values, rituals, and social customs within your society?
2. Make a list of five co-cultural groups that you currently belong to. How do each of these different co-cultural groups influence who you are as a person?
3. Many organizations are known for creating, or attempting to create, very specific microcultures. Thinking about your college or university, how would you explain your microculture to someone unfamiliar with your culture?
4. Aside from Disney, can you think of other microcultures in the U.S. or your country of

origin? For example, Cleveland, OH's Rock and Roll Hall of Fame used to call its volunteers "Roadies".

The Function of Culture

Learning Objectives

1. Define collective self-esteem and describe its four components.
2. Explain how collective self-esteem influences intercultural communication.
3. Define stereotype and distinguish between cultural and personal stereotypes.
4. Summarize the problems stereotypes cause in interpersonal communication.
5. Explain the concept of ethnocentrism and describe its effects on intercultural interaction.

Culture serves multiple important functions in shaping how we perceive ourselves, others, and the world around us. One of culture's most significant roles is providing us with a sense of identity and belonging through our membership in various cultural groups, which directly affects our self-worth and confidence in intercultural interactions. Culture also supplies us with cognitive shortcuts, such as stereotypes—generalized beliefs about social groups that can be both helpful and harmful in our communication with others. Culture establishes norms and standards that we often assume are universal, leading to ethnocentric viewpoints that judge other cultures against our own cultural framework. Understanding these cultural functions is crucial for effective intercultural communication, as they shape our perceptions, expectations, and behaviors when interacting with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Collective Self-Esteem

Henri Tajfel originally coined the term "collective self" as "that aspect of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership."⁸ Jennifer Crocker and Riia Luhtanen took Tajfel's ideas one step further. They discussed them as an individual's **collective self-esteem**, or the aspect of an individual's self-worth or self-image that stems from their interaction with others and evaluation of their various social groups.⁹ Based on their research, Crocker and Luhtanen found four different factors related to an individual's collective self-esteem: private collective esteem, membership esteem, public collective esteem, and importance to identity.

The first factor of collective self-esteem is the individual's **private collective esteem**, or the degree to which an individual positively evaluates their group. Every individual belongs to a wide range of groups, and we can evaluate these groups as either positive or negative. Imagine you've been brought up in a community where gang membership is a very common practice. You may have been forced into gang life at a very early age. Over time, you may see an array of problems with gangs, so you may start to devalue the group. Here, you would have low private collective esteem.

The second factor of collective self-esteem is **membership esteem**, which is the degree to which an individual sees themselves as a "good" member of a group. Maybe you've belonged to a religious organization your entire life. Over time, you find yourself wondering about the organization and your place within the organization. Perhaps you view yourself as having ideas and opinions that differ from the organization's, or perhaps your behavior outside of religious services does not align with the organization's values. Here, you may see yourself as a "bad" member of this organization, so your membership esteem would be lower than someone who sees themselves as a "good" member of this organization.

The third factor of collective self-esteem is **public collective self-esteem**, or the degree to which nonmembers of a group evaluate a group and its members either positively or negatively. Maybe you're a lesbian college student at a very progressive institution where students overwhelmingly support LGBTQIA rights. In this case, the collective views the group that you belong to positively.

The final factor of collective self-esteem is **importance to identity**, or the degree to which group membership is important to an individual. As mentioned earlier, we all belong to a wide range of cultural groups. Some of these groups are near and dear to us, while others are ones we don't think about very often, so they just aren't very important to us. For example, if you're someone who has always lived in Charleston, South Carolina, then being a member of the Southerner cultural group may be a very important part of your identity. Suppose you ended up leaving the South and moving to Oregon. In that case, this "southerner" label may take on even more meaning for you and become an even stronger identity marker because your immediate cultural group no longer surrounds you.

A wealth of research has been conducted on the importance of collective self-esteem for individuals. For example, if you compare your cultural group as being better than other cultural groups, then you will experience more positive emotions and self-evaluations.¹⁰ However, the opposite is also true. Individuals who compare their cultural groups to those cultural groups that are perceived as "better-off," tend to experience more negative emotions and lower self-evaluations. An individual who is a member of a group that is looked down upon by society will face an internal battle as they grapple with these negative emotions and subsequent lower self-evaluations because of their membership within a cultural group.

You may wonder how this ultimately affects interpersonal communication. Research has examined how an individual's collective self-esteem affects their interpersonal interactions.¹¹ The researchers found that "during interactions in which multicultural persons felt that their heritage culture was being positively evaluated, they were more likely to perceive the interaction as intimate, they disclosed more and perceived their interaction partner as more disclosing, they enjoyed the interaction more, and they were more likely to indicate that they felt personally accepted."¹² Individuals with high collective self-esteem had more favorable interactions with people of differing cultures. Individuals who had low levels of public collective self-esteem recalled fewer intimate social

interactions with people from different cultures. As you can see, cultural self-esteem is a crucial factor in our intercultural interactions with others. For this reason, understanding how we view our cultural identities becomes very important because it can predict the types of intercultural interactions we will ultimately have.

Stereotyping

Stereotypes are “a set of beliefs about the personal attributes of a social group.”¹³ Many people immediately hear the word “stereotype” and cringe because it’s often filled with negative connotations. However, not all stereotypes are necessarily wrong or bad. Some stereotypes exist because they are accurate.¹⁴ Often groups have real differences, and these differences are not bad or wrong; they just are. Let’s look at a real stereotype that plays out. When people hear the words “flight attendant,” they generally associate females with the term. In fact, in the 1980s only 19% of flight attendants were male, and today 26% of flight attendants are male.¹⁵ Are all flight attendants female? Obviously, not; however, the majority of flight attendants are female. We call these types of jobs sex-segregated because the jobs are held overwhelmingly by one biological sex or the other when there is no real reason why either sex cannot be effective within the job. However, many also hold the stereotype that flight attendants are all young. Although this was historically true, the ages of flight attendants has changed: 16-24-year-olds (4.9%), 25-34-year-olds (16.8%), 35-44-year-olds (29.7%), 45-54-year-olds (28.2%), and 55+ year-olds (21.4%).

As you can see, the overwhelming majority of flight attendants are 35 years of age or older. Almost half of flight attendants today are over 45 years of age. Here, the stereotype of the young flight attendant doesn’t align with reality.

There can be two distinctly different stereotypes that people hold: cultural and personal. Cultural stereotypes are beliefs possessed by a larger cultural group about another social group. In contrast, personal stereotypes are those held by an individual and do not reflect a shared belief with their cultural group(s). With cultural stereotypes, cultural members share a belief (or set of beliefs) about another cultural group. For example, maybe you belong to the Yellow culture and perceive all members of the Purple culture as lazy. Often, the stereotypes we hold about other groups (e.g., the Purple People) originate from being taught them from a very young age. Maybe you had an unpleasant experience with a Purple Person being lazy at work, and in your mind, you decide all Purple People must behave like that. In either case, we have a negative stereotype about a cultural group, but how we learn these stereotypes is very different.

Now, even though some stereotypes are accurate and others are inaccurate, it does not mitigate the problem that stereotypes cause. Stereotypes cause problems because people use them to categorize others in snap judgments based solely on group membership. Going back to our previous example, if you run across a Purple person in your next job, you’ll immediately see that person as lazy without having any other information about that person. When we use blanket stereotypes to make *a priori* (before the fact) judgments about someone, we distance ourselves from making accurate, informed decisions about that person (and their cultural group). Stereotypes prejudice us into

looking at all members of a group as similar and ignoring the unique differences among individuals. Additionally, many stereotypes are based on ignorance about another person's culture.

In a study presented at the International Communication Association, researchers examined the way Muslim women are stereotypically presented in media images as opposed to the way Muslim women choose to portray themselves when posting images under the hashtag #Muslimwomen. When Muslim women portrayed themselves in images, they selected images in which they were engaged in sports, panel discussion, displaying fashion choices or makeup, and smiling faces. The women chose to post images with or without scarves or niqabs or hijabs. When compared to Western media images, stereotyped images often depict Muslim women as victims with a narrow range clothing in subservient roles. The researchers concluded that when Muslim women select their own images the images reflect a sense of agency and subjectivity as opposed to media images depicting them as oppressed objects who are victims.¹⁶

Try this exercise: picture someone named Mel. OK, now picture someone named Hillary. What did the people you pictured look like? The immediate impressions we get in our minds occur because of the stereotypes we associate with these words. One of our authors has a cousin named Melanie, who is often called Mel by the family, and our coauthor had a close male friend in college named Hillary. This simple exercise demonstrates how often and easy it is for stereotypes to enter our heads.

Culture as Normative

Another function of culture is that it helps us establish norms. Essentially, one's culture is normative,¹⁷ or we assume that our culture's rules, regulations, and norms are correct and those of other cultures are deviant, which is highly ethnocentric. The term **ethnocentrism** can be defined as the degree to which an individual views the world from their own culture's perspective while evaluating other cultures according to their own culture's preconceptions, often accompanied by feelings of dislike, mistrust, or hate for cultures deemed inferior. We all live in a world where we are raised in a dominant culture. Because we are raised in a specific dominant culture, we judge other cultures based on what we've been taught within our own culture. We also believe our own culture is right, moral, ethical, and legal. When a culture appears to waiver from what our culture has taught is right, moral, ethical, legal, etc., we judge those cultures as inferior.

One problem many American tourists face when traveling abroad is not knowing the laws of other nations and assuming their "normal" behavior will be tolerated in other countries the following table is a list of some crimes you may have committed today if you were visiting somewhere outside the United States.

Table 6.1 Cultural Law Violations

Country	Violated Law or Custom	Example Incident(s)	Penalty
Japan	Wearing shoes into homes/temples	Walking into a temple with shoes on	Fines, warnings

Country	Violated Law or Custom	Example Incident(s)	Penalty
Thailand	Disrespecting royal family, head contact	Unknowingly criticizing the monarchy	Imprisonment
Italy	Vandalizing heritage, stealing artifacts	Removing artifacts from Pompeii, carving into the Colosseum	Arrest, fines
Cambodia	Nudity at sacred sites	Posing nude at Angkor Wat	Arrest, deported
India/Middle East	Public displays of affection	Kissing in public	Jail/fines
Singapore	Importing controlled substances	Bringing e-cigarettes, chewing gum into the country	Jail, fines
UK/Italy	Offensive gestures	“Peace” sign in UK, “hook ’em horns” at Vatican	Arrest, fines

One that may surprise you is the use of the “peace” sign in the UK. The simple gesture of pointing your index finger and middle finger in the shape of the letter “V” carries a dual meaning, contingent upon the orientation of your hands. When the palm faces outward, away from the body, it signifies “V for Victory” or peace, a universally recognized gesture popularized by figures such as Winston Churchill. Conversely, when the palm faces inwards, toward the body, with the back of the hand visible, it transforms into a highly offensive insult akin to the middle finger in other cultures. This “two-fingered salute” conveys contempt or derision, with its origins as a vulgar gesture in the British Isles dating back to at least the early 20th century. Although not typically resulting in severe legal consequences for a casual, isolated instance, its use in public can be viewed as a form of disorderly conduct. Suppose you flash the “V” sign while committing another act of aggression (such as during a road rage altercation). In that case, the sign can be deemed threatening or abusive, which may constitute a public order offense leading to fines or, in more serious confrontational scenarios, further legal charges. The ‘Hook ’em Horns’ gesture is a distinctive hand sign used by University of Texas supporters to celebrate the Longhorns and pay tribute to their mascot, Bevo. The sign was also used as a sign of alleged Satanic worshippers during the 1980s, and several U.S. citizens were arrested for using the sign outside Vatican City. In other parts of Italy, the gesture also explains that someone’s wife is engaging in an extramarital affair with another man (but in a much cruder fashion).¹⁸

At the same time, ethnocentrism isn’t 100% a horrible thing either. Shortly after 9-11, a flag shortage occurred in the United States because people wanted to display their unity and pride during those awful days after the atrocities that occurred on U.S. soil. Patriotism is a milder form of ethnocentrism. The fact that we view ourselves as “American” is even somewhat ethnocentric because technically, there are three rather large countries that are all in North America and 13 in South America. By definition, we’re all Americans. However, U.S. citizens have clung to the title “American” without ever giving thought to the other countries that exist on these two continents. Here’s another interesting fact. I was recently surfing the Internet looking for uses of the word “American” for this chapter. Here is one I found from a protester in Alabama: “We live in America. We speak

American.” I’ll give the speaker the benefit of the doubt and believe she meant U.S. citizens speak English, which is true for most citizens in the United States (78.3% according to U.S. Census data from 2021)¹⁹ However, more people in North and South America do not speak English when compared to those who do.

Why “America”

The term “America” is believed to have been coined by a cartographer named Martin Waldseemüller, a cleric from the cathedral village of St.-Dié, France. Martin created what is considered to be the “birth certificate of America” by creating a map charting what was the known world at the time. You can view this map on the U.S. Library of Congress’ website (<http://www.loc.gov/resource/g3200.ct000725/>).

When looking at this map, look to the bottom left-hand side of the map; you will see the inscription “America.” This label assigned credit for discovering South America to Amerigo Vespucci instead of Christopher Columbus.

Key Takeaways

- Collective self-esteem is the aspect of an individual’s self-worth that comes from how they evaluate their membership in cultural or social groups. It includes four parts:
 - Private collective esteem—how positively or negatively someone evaluates their group
 - Membership esteem—how positively someone views themselves as a member of that group
 - Public collective esteem—how nonmembers evaluate the group
 - Importance to identity—how central group membership is to the individual’s self-concept
- Individuals with higher collective self-esteem have more positive intercultural interactions, whereas those with lower collective self-esteem often experience less satisfying cross-cultural communication.
- Stereotypes are beliefs about social groups based on generalized perceptions.
 - Cultural stereotypes are shared by a broader group or society.
 - Personal stereotypes are held individually and may not reflect cultural consensus.
- Even accurate stereotypes can be harmful when used to make snap judgments about individuals. Stereotyping leads to overgeneralization and prevents us from seeing peo-

ple as unique individuals.

- Ethnocentrism is the tendency to judge other cultures through the lens of one's own culture. While mild forms (like patriotism) can foster identity and pride, more extreme forms can hinder intercultural understanding and reinforce prejudice.

Exercises

1. Think about a group that you currently belong to and consider the collective self-esteem you have for that group. How do you view this group in all four types of esteem: private collective, membership, public collective, and importance to identity?
2. List the various stereotypes that you can think of for the following different groups: gay male, transgender male, African American male, Hispanic female, White male, and Pakistani female. How do you think these stereotypes would affect your interpersonal interactions with people from these different groups?
3. Think about ethnocentrism in your own life. When do you think ethnocentrism helps you have collective self-esteem? When do you think it leads to prejudice?

Cultural Characteristics and Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Define and differentiate between Edward T. Hall's concepts of low-context and high-context cultures.
2. Explain the significance of Geert Hofstede's six cultural dimensions and how they affect interpersonal and organizational communication.
3. Describe Stella Ting-Toomey's face-negotiation theory, including the concepts of self-face, other-face, and mutual-face.
4. Understand the concept of face functions across cultures and its relevance in managing intercultural conflict.

In any major area of academic study, there are luminaries 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 who have helped shape our understand-

ing of culture and intercultural communication: Edward T. Hall, Geert Hofstede, and Stella Ting-Toomey.

Edward T. Hall

One of the earliest researchers in the field of cultural differences and their significance to communication was Edward T. Hall. His book, *Beyond Culture*, is still considered one of the most influential books in the field of intercultural communication.^{20 21} 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.”²² 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, exiting an airplane in Brazil, flashing his famous “OK” sign with his thumb and forefinger forming a circle, but this is actually 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 Hall’s 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 coined by Hall to describe the differences in communication styles 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.”²³ Table 6.2 further explores the differences between low-context and high-context cultures. In Table 6.2, we broke down issues of context into three general categories: communication, cultural orientation, and business.

Table 6.2 Low-Context vs. High-Context Cultures

		Low-Context	High-Context
Communication	Type of Communication	Explicit Communication	Implicit Communication
	Communication Focus	Focus on Verbal Communication	Focus on Nonverbal Communication
	Context of Message	Less Meaningful	Very Meaningful
	Politeness	Not Important	Very Important
	Approach to People	Direct and Confrontational	Indirect and Polite

		Low-Context	High-Context
Cultural Orientation	Emotions	No Room for Emotions	Emotions Have Importance
	Approach to Time	Monochromatic	Polychromatic
	Time Orientation	Present-Future	Past
	In/Out-Groups	Flexible and Transient Grouping Patterns	Strong Distinctions Between In and Out-Groups
	Identity	Based on Individual	Based on Social System
	Values	Independence and Freedom	Tradition and Social Rules/Norms
Business	Work Style	Individualistic	Team-Oriented
	Work Approach	Task-Oriented	Relationship-Oriented
	Business Approach	Competitive	Cooperative
	Learning	Knowledge is Transferable	Knowledge is Situational
	Sales Orientation	Hard Sell	Soft Sell
	View of Change	Change over Tradition	Tradition over Change

You may wonder, by this point, how low-context and high-context cultures differ across different countries. Figure 6.1 illustrates some patterns of context that exist in today's world.²⁴

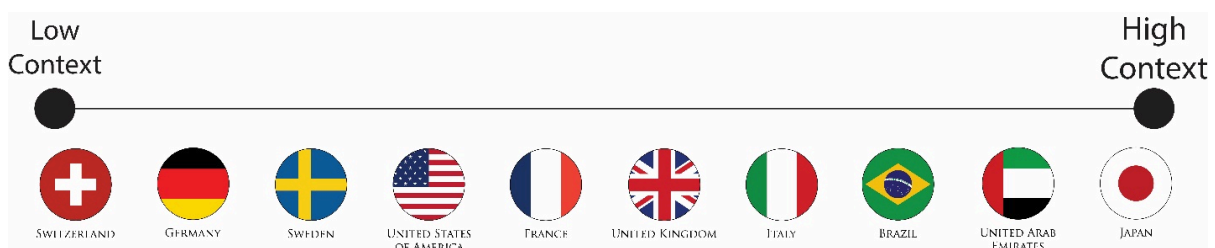


Figure 6.1 Low- and High-Context Nations

Geert Hofstede

Another very important researcher in culture is Geert Hofstede, a man by that name. 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.²⁵ Over the years, Geert has fine-tuned his theory of culture, and the most recent update to his theory occurred in 2010.²⁶

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 look briefly 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 could 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. With power distances, these differences often manifest themselves within a single culture, such as class, education, occupations, and healthcare. With class, many cultures have three clear segments: low, middle, and upper. However, the concepts of what is low, middle, and upper can have enormous differences. For example, the median income for the average U.S. household is \$51,100.²⁷ When discussing household incomes, we use the median (middle-most number) because it's the most accurate representation of income. According to a 2013 report from the U.S. Census Bureau (using income data from 2012), here is how income inequality in the United States 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.²⁸

However, income is just one indicator of power distance within a culture. Another aspect of power distance is the ability or the right to access education within a society. Other indicators of power distances can include: health care (who gets it and what type), occupations (what kinds of jobs are available to different segments of society), governmental influence (who can and who can't create political outcomes), etc. According to Hofstede's most recent data, the five countries with the highest power distances are: Malaysia, Slovakia, Guatemala, Panama, and the Philippines.²⁹ The five countries with the lowest power distances are Austria, Israel, Denmark, New Zealand, and Switzerland (German-speaking part). Notice that the United States does not make it into the top five or the bottom five. According to Hofstede's data, the United States ranks 16th from the bottom in terms of power distance, placing us in the bottom third. 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.³⁰ Americans are individualistic. We think of ourselves as individuals rather than as a collective group. Most Asian countries are considered collectivistic cultures because these cultures are group-focused. Collectivistic cultures tend to consider actions that might impact the entire group rather than specific group members.

In an individualistic culture, there is a prevailing belief that one can do as they please and follow their dreams or 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 they serve. Moreover, in a collectivistic culture, there is a prevailing belief that one should prioritize the group's interests. Collectivistic cultures emphasize the group's potential for growth and productivity. Collectivists are more likely to focus their attention on others than themselves as an individual.

Masculinity vs. Femininity

The notions 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.³¹ On the masculine end of the spectrum, individuals are focused on items like earnings, recognition, advancement, and challenge. Hofstede also refers to these tendencies as being more assertive. Femininity involves characteristics such as maintaining a good working relationship with one's manager and coworkers, cooperating with others at work, and achieving security (both in one's job and family). Hofstede refers to this as being more relationally oriented. Admittedly, in Hofstede's research, there is a difference between females and males on these characteristics (females are more relationally oriented and males are more assertive), which is why Hofstede went with the terms masculinity and femininity. 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].³²

The top five most masculine countries are Slovakia, Japan, Hungary, Austria, and Venezuela (the United States ranks 19th out of 76); whereas, Sweden, Norway, Latvia, the Netherlands, and Denmark represent the most feminine countries. 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 expected to be healthy and wealthy. As such, women are often placed in a subservient position to their husbands and are socially identified by them. For example, an invitation to

a party would be addressed to “Mr. and Mrs. John Smith.” In feminine cultures, men and women are held 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.³³ 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 are afraid 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 people in these cultures have higher levels of anxiety and neuroticism. 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,” highlighting the threat factor that people in high uncertainty avoidance cultures feel.³⁴ 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. There tend to be higher levels of prejudice and higher levels of ideological, political, and religious fundamentalism, which does not allow for any debate.

Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation

Besides the previous characteristics, Hofstede identified a fifth characteristic of cultures, which he termed long-term and short-term orientation. Long-term orientation focuses on the future, rather than 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 reap the benefits later. The same is true of thrift. We want to conserve our resources and underspend to build a 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 is a high respect for the past and the various traditions that have contributed to the greatness of that culture. 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.³⁵

Indulgence vs. Restraint

The final characteristic of cultures is a new one first reported on in the 2010 edition of *Cultures and Organizations*.³⁶ The sixth cultural characteristic is called indulgence vs. restraint, which examines issues of happiness and well-being. 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* [emphasis in original].”³⁷ 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 United States is positioned toward the indulgence end of the spectrum and ranks #15, alongside Canada and the Netherlands. Some interesting findings associated with indulgence include experiencing higher levels of positive emotions and recalling those emotions for longer periods. Individuals from more indulgent cultures are more optimistic, while their restrained counterparts are more likely to be cynical. People in more indulgent countries are happier than their restrained counterparts, and individuals within indulgent cultures exhibit lower rates of cardiovascular problems commonly associated with stress. Ultimately, individuals from indulgent cultures are more extraverted and outgoing overall, whereas those from restrained cultures are 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 has 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 as verbal statements, nonverbal behaviors, and social support.”³⁸

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

With 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 regarding trait affection given.

With 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 regard 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."³⁹

Stella Ting-Toomey

In 1988, intercultural communication researcher Stella Ting-Toomey developed face-negotiation theory to help explain the importance of face within interpersonal interactions.⁴⁰ The basic idea behind face-negotiation theory is that face-saving, conflict, and culture are all intertwined. In the most recent version of her theory, Stella Ting-Toomey outlines seven basic factors of face-negotiation theory:

1. People in all cultures try to maintain and negotiate face in all communication situations.
2. The concept of face is especially problematic in emotionally vulnerable situations (such as embarrassment, requests, or conflict situations) when the communicators' identities are called into question.
3. The cultural variability dimensions of individualism-collectivism and small/large power distance shape the orientations, movements, contents, and styles of facework.
4. Individualism-collectivism shapes members' preferences for self-oriented facework versus other-oriented facework.
5. Small/large power distance shapes members' preferences for horizontal-based facework versus vertical-based facework.
6. The cultural variability dimensions, encompassing individual, relational, and situational factors, influence the use of specific facework behaviors in particular cultural contexts.
7. Intercultural facework competence refers to the optimal integration of knowledge, mindfulness, and communication skills in managing vulnerable identity-based conflict situations appropriately, effectively, and adaptively.⁴¹

Foremost, communication and face are highly intertwined concepts; therefore, when approaching an intercultural encounter, it is essential to remember the interrelationship between the two. As far as Ting-Toomey's theory goes, she takes this idea one step further to understanding how face and communication ultimately enable successful intercultural conflict management. Face-negotiation theory is ultimately concerned with three different faces: self-face (concern for our face), other-face (concern for another person's face), and mutual-face (concern for both interactants and the relationship).⁴² As you can see from Ting-Toomey's last assumption in her theory above, individuals who are competent in facework can recognize when facework is necessary and then handle those

situations appropriately, effectively, and adaptively. As such, facework should be viewed as a necessary component for understanding any form of interpersonal interaction but is especially important when examining interpersonal interactions that occur between people from differing cultural backgrounds.

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 concept, even though the idea of “saving face” is pretty common in everyday talk today. According to Hsien Chin Hu, the concept of face stems from two distinct Chinese words, *lien* and *mien-tzu*.⁴³ *Lien* “represents the confidence of society in the integrity of ego’s moral character, losing 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.”⁴⁴ 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.”⁴⁵ However, David Yau-fai Ho argues 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 congruence between judgments of his total condition in life, including his actions and 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.⁴⁶

More simply, 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.”⁴⁷ 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, etc.). In contrast, 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, etc.).

Key Takeaways

- Edward T. Hall introduced the concepts of:

- Low-context cultures, where communication is explicit, direct, and relies heavily on words.
- High-context cultures, where communication is implicit, relational, and meaning is derived from nonverbal cues and social context.
- Geert Hofstede identified six cultural dimensions that vary across societies and shape communication:
 - Power Distance—Acceptance of unequal power distribution.
 - Individualism vs. Collectivism—Focus on individual goals vs. group harmony.
 - Masculinity vs. Femininity—Preference for assertiveness vs. relationship and quality of life.
 - Uncertainty Avoidance—Comfort with ambiguity and risk.
 - Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation—Emphasis on future planning vs. tradition and present.
 - Indulgence vs. Restraint—Degree of freedom in fulfilling human desires and enjoying life.
- Stella Ting-Toomey's Face-Negotiation Theory highlights:
 - All people negotiate face (public self-image) during communication, especially in emotionally sensitive or conflict situations.
 - Cultural dimensions (like individualism/collectivism and power distance) influence facework styles.
 - Facework can be self-oriented, other-oriented, or mutual, and intercultural competence requires adapting face strategies appropriately.
- The concept of face involves how others perceive your social standing, reputation, and moral integrity. It includes:
 - Face-gaining behavior enhances prestige and status.
 - Face-losing behavior damages one's social image and reputation.

Exercises

1. Compare and contrast two countries and their levels of context. Why do you think context is such an important cultural characteristic?
2. Consider a co-cultural group to which you belong. 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 interacting with an individual from India. During the middle of the con-

versation, 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?

Improving Intercultural Communication Skills

Learning Objectives

1. Define cultural intelligence (CQ) and describe its four key components: cognitive, motivational, metacognitive, and behavioral.
2. Explain how metacognitive CQ supports intercultural understanding through awareness and adaptability during intercultural interactions.
3. Identify specific strategies to increase cultural intelligence and foster more effective intercultural communication.
4. Describe the role of mindfulness—through attention, intention, and attitude—in building successful intercultural relationships.
5. Apply mindful techniques to recognize and address personal and cultural stereotypes during intercultural encounters.

Effective intercultural communication is not an innate ability but a set of skills that can be developed and refined through intentional practice and self-awareness. As our world becomes increasingly interconnected, the ability to navigate cultural differences successfully has become essential for personal and professional success. Two key approaches can significantly enhance our intercultural communication competence: developing cultural intelligence through systematic learning and behavioral adaptation, and engaging in culturally mindful interactions that emphasize present-moment awareness and non-judgmental openness. By cultivating these skills, we can transcend surface-level cultural encounters to foster meaningful relationships across cultural boundaries, mitigate misunderstandings, and cultivate more inclusive environments where diverse perspectives are valued and respected.

Become Culturally Intelligent

One of the latest buzzwords in the business world is “cultural intelligence,” which was initially introduced to the scholarly community in 2003 by P. Christopher Earley and Soon Ang.⁴⁸ In the past decade, a wealth of research has been conducted examining the importance of cultural intelligence during interpersonal interactions with people from other cultures. Cultural intelligence (CQ)

is defined as an “individual’s capability to function effectively in situations characterized by cultural diversity.”⁴⁹

Four Factors of Cultural Intelligence

In their original study on the topic, Earley and Ang proposed that cultural intelligence is comprised of four distinct factors: cognitive, motivational, metacognitive, and behavioral dimensions. Before continuing, take a minute and complete the Cultural Intelligence Questionnaire.

Cultural Intelligence Questionnaire

Instructions: Read the following questions and select the answer that corresponds with your perception. Do not be concerned if some of the items appear similar. Please use the scale below to rate the degree to which each statement applies to you.

Never True	Rarely True	Sometimes True	Often True	Almost Always True
1	2	3	4	5

_____1. When I’m interacting with someone from a differing culture, I know when I use my knowledge of that person’s culture during my interactions.

_____2. When I interact with someone from a culture I know nothing about, I have no problem adjusting my perspective of their culture while we talk.

_____3. During intercultural interactions, I am well aware of the cultural knowledge I utilize.

_____4. I always check my knowledge of someone from another culture to ensure that my understanding of their culture is accurate.

_____5. During my intercultural interactions, I try to be mindful of how my perceptions of someone’s culture are either consistent with or differ from reality.

_____6. I pride myself on knowing a lot about other people’s cultures.

_____7. I understand the social, economic, and political systems of other cultures.

_____8. I know about other cultures’ religious beliefs and values.

_____9. I understand how daily life is enacted in other cultures.

_____10. I know the importance of paintings, literature, and other forms of art in other cultures.

_____11. I enjoy reaching out and engaging in an intercultural encounter.

- _____12. I would have no problem socializing with people from a new culture.
- _____13. Although intercultural encounters often involve stress, I don't mind the stress because meeting people from new cultures makes it worth it.
- _____14. I would have no problems accustoming myself to the routines of another culture.
- _____15. I enjoy being with people from other cultures and getting to know them.
- _____16. I know how to interact verbally with people from different cultures.
- _____17. I know how to interact nonverbally with people from different cultures.
- _____18. I can vary my rate of speech if an intercultural encounter requires it.
- _____19. I can easily alter my behaviors to suit the needs of an intercultural encounter.
- _____20. I can alter my facial expressions if an intercultural encounter requires it.

Scoring:

Add your scores for the indicated question ranges in the total column.

Factor	Question Range	Total
Intercultural Knowledge	6-10	
Intercultural Motivation	11-15	
Intercultural Behavior	16-20	
Intercultural Understanding	1-5	

Interpretation:

Scores for each of the four factors (intercultural understanding, intercultural knowledge, intercultural motivation, and intercultural behavior) can be added together to get a composite score. Each of the four factors exists on a continuum from 5 (not culturally intelligent) to 25 (highly culturally intelligent). An average person would score between 12–18.

Based on:

Van Dyne, L., Ang, S., & Koh, C. (2008). Development and validation of the CQS: The Cultural Intelligence Scale. In S. Ang & L. Van Dyne (Eds.), *Handbook of cultural intelligence: Theory, measurement, and application* (pp. 16–38). M. E. Sharpe.

Cognitive CQ

Cognitive CQ involves knowing different cultures (intercultural knowledge). Many types of knowledge about a culture can be relevant during an intercultural interaction: rules and norms, economic and legal systems, cultural values and beliefs, the importance of art within a society, etc. All

of these different areas of knowledge involve facts that can help you understand people from different cultures. For example, in most of the United States, maintaining eye contact is very important when talking to someone. You may have even been told by someone to “look at me when I’m talking to you” if you’ve ever gotten in trouble. However, this isn’t consistent across different cultures at all. Hispanic, Asian, Middle Eastern, and Native American cultures often view direct eye contact when talking to someone superior as a sign of disrespect. Understanding how eye contact is perceived across cultures can help you better interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Probably one of the best books to read for insight into how to communicate effectively in another culture is Terri Morrison and Wayne A. Conaway’s book, *Kiss, Bow, or Shake Hands: The Bestselling Guide to Doing Business in More than 60 Countries*.⁵⁰

Motivational CQ

We have motivational CQ, which refers to the degree to which an individual desires to engage in intercultural interactions and can easily adapt to different cultural environments. Motivation is the key to effective intercultural interaction. You can have all the knowledge in the world, but if you are not motivated to have successful intercultural interactions, you will not have them.

Metacognitive CQ

Metacognitive CQ involves being consciously aware of your intercultural interactions in a manner that enables you to have more effective interpersonal experiences with people from diverse cultures (intercultural understanding). All of the knowledge about cultural differences in the world will not be beneficial if you cannot use that information to understand and adapt your behavior during an interpersonal interaction with someone from a different culture. As such, we must continually learn about cultures, but also be prepared to adjust our understanding of people and their cultures through our interactions with them.

Behavioral CQ

Behavioral CQ is the next step following metacognitive CQ, which involves behaving in a manner consistent with what you know about other cultures.⁵¹ We should never expect others to adjust to us culturally. Instead, culturally intelligent people realize that it’s best to adapt our behaviors (verbally and nonverbally) to bridge the cultural gap between people. When we go out of our way to be culturally intelligent, we encourage others to do the same.

As you can see, becoming a truly culturally intelligent person requires considerable effort. As such, it’s essential to invest time in developing your cultural intelligence if you are to be an effective communicator in today’s world.

Research Spotlight



In 2021, Zahra Bostan and colleagues examined the relationship between cultural intelligence (CQ), spiritual intelligence (SQ), and interpersonal communication skills among 125 tour guides working at Iran's Imam Reza Shrine, a religious site that attracts 20 million international visitors annually.⁵² Interpersonal communication skills were assessed through three dimensions: listening skills, emotional regulation, and understanding verbal and nonverbal messages.

Using structural equation modeling, the researchers found that cultural intelligence had a significant positive effect on interpersonal communication skills, demonstrating that tour guides with higher cultural intelligence were substantially better at conducting appropriate communication with international visitors. This finding supports the idea that individuals who can effectively adapt to different cultural contexts and understand cultural nuances are better equipped to listen actively, regulate their emotions, and interpret both verbal and nonverbal communication cues when interacting with people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Engaging Culturally Mindful Interactions

Admittedly, being culturally competent requires a significant amount of work and practice. Even if you're not completely culturally competent, you can engage with people from other cultures mindfully. As discussed in [Chapter 1](#), Shauna Shapiro and Linda Carlson introduced us to the three-component model of mindfulness: attention, intention, and attitude.⁵³

First, when engaging with people from other cultures, we need to be fully present in the moment and not dwell on previous interactions with individuals from that culture or potential future interactions. Instead, it's essential to focus on the person you are interacting with. You also need to be aware of any stereotypes and prejudices you may hold about people from a different culture. Don't try to find evidence to support or negate these stereotypes or prejudices. If you focus on evidence-finding, you're just trying to satisfy your thoughts and feelings and not mindfully engaging with this other person. Also, if you find that your mind is shifting, recognize the shift and allow yourself to re-center on your interaction with the other person.

Second, enter an intercultural interaction with a clear intention. If your goal is to learn more about that person's culture, that's a great intention. However, that may not be the only intention we have when interacting with someone from another culture. For example, you may interact with someone from another culture because you're trying to sell them a product you represent. If your primary intention is sales, then be aware of your intention and don't deceive yourself into thinking it's something more altruistic.

Lastly, approach all intercultural interactions with the right attitude. Remember, the goal of being mindful is to be open, kind, and curious. Although we often discuss mindfulness in terms of how we can be open, kind, and curious with ourselves, it's also important to extend that same framework when we are interacting with people from other cultures. Much of a mindful relationship is about embodying the right attitude during our interactions with others. If you need a refresher on building the right attitude during your interactions, go back and look at Daniel Siegel's COAL Jon Kabat-Zinn's Seven Attitudes for Mindfulness discussed in [Chapter 1](#).

Overall, the goal of mindful intercultural interactions is to be present in the moment in a non-judgmental way. When you face judgments, recognize them, and ask yourself where they have come from. Interrogate those judgments. Don't judge yourself for having these ideas. If we have stereotypes about a specific culture, it's essential to acknowledge those stereotypes, challenge them, understand their origins, and evaluate their factual accuracy.

For example, imagine you're talking to someone from the Republic of Kiribati. Chances are, you've probably never heard of the Republic of Kiribati, but it's a real country in Oceania. But let's say all you know about the people from the Republic of Kiribati is that they like European-style football. During your interaction, you say, "So, what's your favorite football team?" In this moment, you've taken the one stereotype you had and used it to help engage in an interaction. However, if the person comes back and says, "I really don't care. Sports aren't my thing." How do you respond? First, recognize that you attempted to use a stereotype that you had and call it out for what it was. That doesn't make you a bad person, but we must learn from these encounters and broaden our worldviews. Second, call out the stereotype in your mind. Before that moment, you may not have even realized that you had a stereotype of people from the Republic of Kiribati. Labeling our stereotypes of other people is important because it helps us recognize them faster, the more we engage in this type of mindful behavior. Third, figure out where that stereotype came from. Maybe you had been in New Zealand and saw a match on the television and saw the Kiribati national football team. In that one moment, you learned a tiny bit about an entire country and pocketed it away for future use. Sometimes it's easy to figure out where our stereotypes originated. Still, sometimes these stereotypes are so ingrained in us through our own culture that it's hard to really determine their origin. Last, it's time to realize that your stereotype may not be that factual. At the same time, you may have found the one resident of the Republic of Kiribati who doesn't like football. We can often make these determinations by talking to the other person.

It's also important to be mindfully open to the other person's stereotypes of people within your own culture. For example, someone from the Republic of Kiribati may have a stereotype that Americans know nothing about football (other than American football). If you're a fan of what we in the United States call soccer, then you correct that stereotype or at least provide that person a more nuanced understanding of your own culture. Sure, American football is still the king of sports in the United States, but media trends for watching football (soccer) are growing, and more and more Americans are becoming fans.

Key Takeaways

- Cultural intelligence (CQ) is a person's ability to communicate and function effectively across different cultural contexts. It includes:
 - Cognitive CQ—Knowing facts about different cultures (e.g., values, behaviors, history).
 - Motivational CQ—Having the desire and persistence to engage across cultures.
 - Metacognitive CQ—Being aware of and adjusting your cultural assumptions in real-time.
 - Behavioral CQ—Adapting your verbal and nonverbal behavior appropriately in intercultural situations.
 - Metacognitive CQ—Enabling individuals to pause, reflect, and adapt during intercultural communication. It involves consciously checking assumptions and remaining flexible when encountering new cultural information.
- Strategies to improve intercultural communication include:
 - Learning more about your own and others' cultures
 - Practicing cultural humility and curiosity
 - Becoming comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty
 - Challenging your own ethnocentrism
 - Modeling respectful behavior across cultures
- Mindfulness in intercultural communication involves three elements:
 - Attention—Staying present and focused on the current interaction.
 - Intention—Being aware of your goals in the interaction.
 - Attitude—Approaching others with openness, kindness, and curiosity.
- Mindful communicators recognize and investigate stereotypes they hold about other cultures and themselves. They question where these beliefs come from, evaluate their accuracy, and seek a more nuanced understanding through ongoing dialogue.

Exercises

1. The Cultural Intelligence Center has created a widely used 20-item measure of cultural intelligence. Please take a moment to complete their measure: the [Cultural Intelligence Scale](#) (see page 366 in the article). What were your CQ strengths and CQ weaknesses? Where would you most want to improve your CQ?

2. Visit the [National Center for Cultural Competence](http://www.ncc.culturecentral.org/). Read some of the material on their website. Look at their ideas and compare them to what you've learned in this section.
3. James L. Mason created a cultural competence tool for service agencies (<http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED399684.pdf>). Look at their tool, which is available online for free. What do you think of their tools for evaluating cultural competence? Do you think cultural competence and cultural intelligence are similar, different, or identical? Why?
4. What would you tell individuals from other countries travelling to the U.S. to help them increase their cultural intelligence? What should tourist know before coming to the U.S.?

Key Terms

behavioral CQ

belief

co-culture

cognitive CQ

collective self-esteem

collectivism

cultural intelligence

culture

culture as normative

dominant culture

ethnocentrism

face

feminine

high-context cultures

importance to identity

indigenous peoples

individualism

indulgence

long-term orientation

low-context cultures

masculine

membership esteem

metacognitive CQ

microculture

motivational CQ

norms

ostracized

power distance

private collective esteem

public collective self-esteem

restraint

rules

short-term orientation

stereotype

uncertainty avoidance

values

Chapter Wrap-Up

In this chapter, we began by discussing the meaning of the word “culture,” while also considering the concepts of co-culture and microcultures. We then examined the critical functions that culture plays in our daily lives. Next, we discussed the intersection of culture and communication. Last, we concluded this chapter by discussing how you can enhance your intercultural communication skills.

Chapter Exercises

Real-World Case Study

Roy and Jalissa originally met in graduate school. On the first day Jalissa walked into grad school, she was glad to see someone her age, who was older than the average student in the class. Even though Roy was White and Jalissa was African American, the two immediately felt drawn to each other. Before they knew it, Jalissa and Roy were inseparable. Jalissa’s husband started to get jealous of Roy until he met Roy and realized that Roy was gay.

Over the years, the two graduated and went to different jobs that were close to each other. Roy and Jalissa would still get together regularly and go shopping, to the movies, and have dinner, etc. The two of them considered themselves as highly culturally intelligent people. Jalissa was a Dean of Diversity at a liberal arts college, and Roy taught cultural studies at a large research university. The two often had pet names for each other that people outside of their relationship could view as racist or homophobic, but they knew the spirit behind their pet names was meant in jest and not ignorance, ethnocentrism, or fear.

One day Roy and Jalissa were hanging around in a store when Roy found an African Mask. Roy grabbed the mask, walked up behind Jalissa, and shouted, “Abugga bugga!” Jalissa turned around and laughingly slapped Roy on the arm, responding, “You White racist cracker!” Jalissa looked at an older White woman standing in the row, completely startled, and she just burst out laughing and Roy joined right in.

1. Was Roy culturally intelligent? Why?
2. Was Jalissa culturally intelligent? Why?
3. Was this interpersonal interaction mindful? Why?

End-of-Chapter Assessment

1. Milagros belongs to a very distinct South American tribe. Bravery is very important in her tribe. From an early age, all boys and girls are taught that bravery is akin to being a member of the tribe. Furthermore, people who are not brave are often banished from the tribe. For this tribe, what does bravery represent?
 - a. a rule
 - b. a norm

- c. a value
 - d. a belief
 - e. a worth
2. African Americans; Bisexuals, Gays, and Lesbians; Irish Americans, Southerners are all examples of what?
 - a. dominant cultures
 - b. co-cultures
 - c. subcultures
 - d. microcultures
 - e. collaborative cultures
 3. As a transgendered individual, Melanie realizes that many people in her dominant culture do not understand, agree with, nor support transgendered individuals and causes. Which facet of collective self-esteem does this represent?
 - a. private collective esteem
 - b. membership esteem
 - c. public collective esteem
 - d. importance to identity
 - e. other esteem
 4. The degree to which an individual views the world from their own culture's perspective while evaluating other cultures according to their culture's preconceptions often accompanied by feelings of dislike, mistrust, or hate for cultures deemed inferior?
 - a. ethnocentrism
 - b. stereotypes
 - c. prejudice
 - d. discrimination
 - e. cultural annoyance
 5. Juan's culture is marked by expensive houses, fast cars, rich food, and all the luxuries one could desire. Which of Hofstede's cultural differences does Juan's culture represent?
 - a. individualism
 - b. high power distance
 - c. masculinity
 - d. short-term orientation
 - e. indulgence

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Chapter 7: Talking and Listening



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We are constantly interacting with people. We interact with our family and friends. We interact with our teachers and peers at school. We interact with customer service representatives, office coworkers, physicians/therapists, and so many other different people in an average day. Humans are inherently social beings, so talking and listening to one another is a significant part of what we do on a day-to-day basis.

The Importance of Everyday Conversations

Learning Objectives

1. Explain why everyday conversation is essential to interpersonal relationships.
2. Identify the four main types of conversations and distinguish between them using directionality and tone/purpose.

3. Recognize the four basic communication needs that influence human interaction.
4. Describe the six common communication motives people have during interpersonal encounters.
5. Analyze how communication habits form and why they can be difficult to change.

Most of us spend a significant portion of our day interacting with others through conversations. According to Judy Apps, the word “conversation” is comprised of the words *con* (with) and *versare* (turn): “conversation is turn and turnabout – you alternate.”¹ As such, a conversation isn’t a monologue or singular speech act; it’s a dyadic process where two people engage with one another in interaction that has multiple turns. Philosophers have been writing about the notion of the term “conversation” and its importance in society since the written word began.² For our purposes, we will leave the philosophizing to the philosophers and start with the underlying assumption that conversation is an important part of the interpersonal experience. Through conversations with others, we can build, maintain, and terminate relationships.

Crafting an academic definition for the term “conversation” is not a straightforward task. Instead, Donald Allen and Rebecca Guy offer the following explanation: “Conversation is the primary basis of direct social relations between persons. As a process occurring in real-time, conversation constitutes a reciprocal and rhythmic interchange of verbal emissions. It is a sharing process which develops a common social experience.”³ From this explanation, a conversation is how people engage in social interaction in their day-to-day lives. From this perspective, a conversation is purely a verbal process. For our purposes, we prefer Susan Brennan’s definition: “Conversation is a joint activity in which two or more participants use linguistic forms and nonverbal signals to communicate interactively.”⁴ Brennan distinguishes between conversations, which can involve two or more people, and dialogues, which involve only two people. For our purposes, this distinction isn’t critical. What is essential is that conversations are one of the most common forms of interpersonal communication.

There is growing concern that in today’s highly mediated world, the simple conversation is becoming a thing of the past. Sherry Turkle is one of the foremost researchers on how humans communicate using technology. She tells the story of an 18-year-old boy who uses texting for most of his fundamental interactions. The boy wistfully told Turkle, “Someday, someday, but certainly not now, I’d like to learn how to have a conversation.”⁵ When she asks millennials across the nation what’s wrong with holding a simple conversation:

“I’ll tell you what’s wrong with having a conversation. It takes place in real-time and you can’t control what you’re going to say.” So that’s the bottom line. Texting, email, posting, all of these things let us present the self as we want to be. We get to edit, and that means we get to delete, and that means we get to retouch, the face, the voice, the flesh, the body—not too little, not too much, just right.⁶

Is this the world we now live in? Have people become so addicted to their technology that holding a simple conversation is becoming passé?

You should not take communication for granted. Upon reading this book, you will notice how crucial communication can be in both our personal and professional lives. Communication is a vital component of our lives. A few years ago, a prison reduced the amount of communication inmates could have with each other. The prison administrators decided they did not want inmates to share information. Yet, over time, the prisoners developed a way to communicate with each other using codes on walls and tapping out messages through pipes. Even when inmates could not talk to each other face-to-face, they still found other ways to communicate.⁷

Consider the benefits of conversation when viewing Comedian Lou Wall's experience in ["Where is Bed?"](#)



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://milnepublishing.geneseo.edu/interpersonal-communication-2nd/?p=95#oembed-1>

Types of Conversations

David Angle argues that conversations can be categorized based on directionality (one-way or two-way) and tone/purpose (cooperative or competitive).⁸ One-way conversations are conversations where an individual is talking *at* the other person and not *with* the other person. Although these exchanges are technically conversations due to the inclusion of nonverbal feedback, one of the conversational partners monopolizes the bulk of the conversation, while the other partner is more of a passive receiver. Two-way conversations are interactions where both parties are actively engaged and involved. In two-way conversations, people are actively talking, providing nonverbal feedback, and listening.

Besides one-way versus two-way interactions, Angle also believes that conversations can be categorized by whether they are cooperative or competitive. Cooperative conversations are marked by a mutual interest in what all parties within the conversation have to contribute. Conversely, individuals in competitive conversations are more concerned with their perspectives than with those of others within the conversation. Angle further breaks down his typology of conversations into four distinct types of conversation (Figure 7.1).

Discourse

The first type of conversation is one-way cooperative, which Angle labeled discourse. The purpose of a discourse conversation is for the sender to transmit information to the receiver. For example, a professor delivering a lecture or a speaker giving a speech.

Dialogue

The second type is what most people consider a traditional conversation: a dialogue (two-way, cooperative). According to Angle, “The goal is for participants to exchange information and build relationships with one another.”⁹ When you go on a first date, the general purpose of most of our conversations in this context is dialogue. If conversations take on one of the other three types, you could find yourself not getting a second date.

Debate

The third type of conversation is the two-way, competitive conversation, which Angle labels “debate.” The debate conversation is less about information giving and more about persuading. From this perspective, debate conversations occur when the ultimate goal of the conversation is to win an argument or persuade someone to change their thoughts, values, beliefs, and behavior. Imagine you’re sitting in a study group and you’re trying to advocate for a specific approach to your group’s project. Here, your goal is to persuade the others within the conversation to your point of view.

Diatribes

Last, Angle discusses the diatribe (one-way, competitive). The goal of the diatribe conversation is “to express emotions, browbeat those that disagree with you, and/or inspire those that share the same perspective.”¹⁰ For example, imagine that your best friend has come over to your dorm room, apartment, or house to vent about the grade they received on a test.



Figure 7.1 Four Types of Conversations

Communication Needs

There are many reasons we communicate with each other, but what are our basic **communication needs**? The primary reason we communicate is to fulfill physical needs. Research has shown that communicating with others is beneficial for our health. There has been a direct link to mental and physical health. For instance, it has been shown that people who have cancer, depression, and even the common cold, can alleviate their symptoms simply by communicating with others. People who communicate their problems, feelings, and thoughts to others are less likely to hold onto grudges, anger, and hostility, which causes less stress on their minds and bodies.

Conversations have a positive impact in the healthcare environment. Researchers worked with health care providers and adolescents to create culture specific health care conversation cards to discuss obesity in the adolescent patient population. Culture specific health care conversation cards can help health care providers build much needed rapport with adolescents who need to discuss sensitive topics.¹¹

Another reason we communicate with others is that it shapes who we are or identity needs. Perhaps you never realized that you were funny until your friends told you that you were quite humorous. Sometimes, we become who we are based on what others say about us. For instance, maybe your mother told you that you are a gifted writer. You believe that information because you were told that by someone you respected. Thus, communication can influence the way we perceive ourselves.

The third reason we communicate is for social needs. We communicate with others to initiate, maintain, and terminate relationships. These relationships may be personal or professional. In either case, we have motives or objectives for communicating with other people. The concept of **communication motives** was created by Rebecca Rubin. She found that there are six main reasons why individuals communicate with each other: control, relaxation, escape, inclusion, affection, and pleasure.

Control motives are means to gain compliance. Relaxation motives are ways to rest or relax. Escape motives are reasons for diverting or avoiding other activities. Inclusion motives are ways to express emotions and feel a connection to the other person. Affection motives are ways to express one's love and caring for another person. Pleasure motives are ways of communicating for enjoyment and excitement.

To maintain our daily routine, we need to communicate with others. The last reason we communicate is for practical needs. To exchange information or solve problems, we need to talk to others. Communication can prevent a disaster from occurring. To create and/or sustain a daily balance in our lives, we need to communicate with other people. Hence, there is no escaping the need for communication. We do it all the time.

Key Takeaways

- Conversation is a central form of interpersonal communication that involves both verbal and nonverbal interaction, typically occurring through turn-taking exchanges. It helps build, maintain, and end relationships.
- There are four types of conversations, based on directionality (one-way vs. two-way) and tone (cooperative vs. competitive):
 - Discourse—one-way, cooperative (e.g., lectures)
 - Dialogue—two-way, cooperative (e.g., most daily conversations)
 - Debate—two-way, competitive (e.g., trying to persuade others)
 - Diatribe—one-way, competitive (e.g., venting frustration or rallying)
- People communicate to meet four basic needs:
 - Physical needs—Communication supports physical and mental health
 - Identity needs—We learn about ourselves through others' feedback
 - Social needs—We form, maintain, and end relationships
 - Practical needs—We solve problems and exchange information
- Six common communication motives help explain why people engage in conversation:
 - Control—To influence others
 - Affection—To show love and care
 - Relaxation—To unwind
 - Pleasure—For enjoyment
 - Inclusion—To feel connected
 - Escape—To avoid something else
- Communication habits form over time and are often unconscious, making them difficult to change, but change is possible with awareness and intentional effort.

Exercises

1. Imagine being unable to communicate verbally with others in a face-to-face situation. How would you adapt your communication to communicate with others still effectively? Why would you pick this method?
2. Create a list of all the reasons you communicate and categorize them based on the communication motives and needs. Why do you think you communicate how you do?
3. Reflect on how you introduce yourself in a new situation. Write what you typically say to a stranger. You can role-play with a friend and then switch roles. What did you

notice? How many of those statements are habitual? Why?

Sharing Personal Information

Learning Objectives

1. Describe the various motives behind self-disclosure, including social integration and impression management.
2. Explain the process of self-disclosure and the contextual and individual factors that influence how, when, and why people disclose.
3. Identify and evaluate the positive and negative consequences of self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships.
4. Draw and accurately explain the four quadrants of the Johari Window and their significance in self-awareness and relational development.

One of the primary functions of conversations is sharing information about ourselves. In [Chapter 2](#), we discussed Berger and Calabrese's Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT).¹² One of the basic axioms of URT is that, as verbal communication increases between people when they first meet, the level of uncertainty decreases. Specifically, the type of verbal communication generally discussed in initial interactions is called self-disclosure.¹³ **Self-disclosure** is the process of purposefully communicating information about oneself. Sidney Jourard sums up self-disclosure as permitting one's "true self" to be known to others.¹⁴

As we introduce the concept of self-disclosure in this section, it's essential to recognize that there's no right or wrong way to self-disclose. Different people self-disclose for various reasons and purposes. Emmi Ignatius and Marja Kokkonen found that self-disclosure can vary for several reasons:¹⁵

- Personality traits (shy people self-disclose less than extraverted people)
- Cultural background (Western cultures disclose more than Eastern cultures)
- Emotional state (happy people self-disclose more than sad or depressed people)
- Biological sex (females self-disclose more than males)
- Psychological gender (androgynous people were more emotionally aware, topically involved, and invested in their interactions; feminine individuals disclosed more in social situations, and masculine individuals generally did not demonstrate meaningful self-disclosure across contexts)
- Status differential (lower-status individuals are more likely to self-disclose personal information than higher-status individuals)
- Physical environment (soft, warm rooms encourage self-disclosure while hard, cold rooms

discourage self-disclosure)

- Physical contact (touch can increase self-disclosure, unless the other person feels that their personal space is being invaded, which can decrease self-disclosure)
- Communication channel (people often feel more comfortable self-disclosing when they're not face-to-face; e.g., on the telephone or through computer-mediated communication)
- Self-disclosure on social networking sites increases consumer intention to purchase goods.¹⁶

As you can see, several factors can influence how self-disclosure occurs during interpersonal interactions.

Motives for Self-Disclosure

So, what ultimately motivates someone to self-disclose? Emmi Ignatius and Marja Kokkonen found two basic reasons for self-disclosure: social integration and impression management.¹⁷

Social Integration

The first reason people self-disclose information about themselves is to develop interpersonal relationships. Part of forming an interpersonal relationship is seeking to demonstrate that we have commonality with another person. For example, let's say that it's the beginning of a new semester, and you're sitting next to someone you've never met before. You quickly strike up a conversation while you're waiting for the professor to show up. During those first few moments of talking, you're going to establish some commonality. Perhaps you'll discover that you're both communication majors or that you share the same favorite sports team or band. Self-disclosure helps us identify areas where we share similar interests, beliefs, values, attitudes, and so on. As humans, we have an innate desire to be social and to meet people. Research has shown that self-disclosure is positively related to liking.¹⁸ The more we self-disclose to others, the more they like us and vice versa.

However, we should note that the distinction between appropriate and inappropriate self-disclosures depends on the nature of your relationship. When we first meet someone, we do not expect that person to start self-disclosing their deepest, darkest secrets. When this happens, we experience an expectancy violation. Judee Burgoon conceptualized expectancy violation theory as an understanding of what happens when an individual within an interpersonal interaction violates the norms for that interaction.^{19 20} Burgoon's original expectancy violation theory (EVT) primarily analyzed what happened when individuals communicated nonverbally in a manner that was unexpected (e.g., standing too close while talking). Over the years, EVT has been expanded by many scholars to look at a range of different situations when communication expectations are violated.²¹ As a whole, EVT predicts that when individuals violate the norms of communication during an interaction, they will evaluate that interaction negatively. However, this depends on the initial relationship. If we've been in a relationship with someone for a long time or if it's someone we want to be in a relationship with, we're more likely to overlook expectancy violations.

So, how does this relate to self-disclosure? Mostly, there are ways that we self-disclose that are considered "normal" during different interactions and contexts. What you disclose to your best friend will be different from what you disclose to a stranger at the bus station. What you disclose to your

therapist will be different than what you disclose to your professor. When you meet a stranger, the types of self-disclosure tend to be reasonably common topics: your major, sports teams, bands, the weather, etc. If, however, you decide to self-disclose information that is overly personal, this would be perceived as a violation of the types of topics typically discussed during initial interactions. As such, the other person is probably going to try to get out of that conversation pretty quickly. When people disclose information that is inappropriate to the context, those interactions will generally be viewed more negatively.²²

From a psychological standpoint, finding these commonalities with others helps reinforce our self-concept. We find that others share the same interests, beliefs, values, attitudes, etc., which demonstrates that how we think, feel, and behave are similar to those around us. Admittedly, it's not like we do all of this consciously.²³

Impression Management

The second reason we tend to self-disclose is to convey a specific impression of ourselves to others. **Impression management** is defined as “the attempt to generate as favorable an impression of ourselves as possible, particularly through both verbal and nonverbal techniques of self-presentation.”²⁴ Basically, we want people to view us specifically, so we communicate with others to get others to see us that way. Research has found we commonly use six impression management techniques during interpersonal interactions: self-descriptions, accounts, apologies, entitlements and enhancements, flattery, and favors.^{25 26 27}

Self-Descriptions

The first type of impression management technique we can use is self-descriptions, which involve discussing specific characteristics of ourselves. For example, if you want others to view you professionally, you would talk about the work that you've accomplished. If you want others to see you as someone fun to be around, you will talk about the parties you've thrown. In both cases, the goal is to describe ourselves in a manner that we want others to see.

Accounts

The second type of impression management is accounts. Accounts “are explanations of a predicament-creating event designed to minimize the apparent severity of the predicament.”²⁸ According to William Gardner and Mark Martinko, in accounts, “actors may deny events occurred, deny causing events, offer excuses, or justify incidents.”²⁹ Essentially, accounts occur when an individual attempts to explain something that their interactant may already know.

For initial interactions, imagine that you're on a first date and your date has heard that you're a bit of a “player.” An account may be given to downplay your previous relationships or explain away the rumors about your previous dating history.

Apologies

The third type of impression management tactic is apologies. According to Barry Schlenker, apologies are “are designed to convince the audience that the undesirable event should not be considered a fair representation of what the actor is ‘really like.’”³⁰ An apology occurs when someone admits that they have done something wrong while attempting to downplay the severity of the incident or the outcomes.

Imagine you just found out that a friend of yours told a personal story about you during class as an example. Your friend could offer an apology, admitting that they shouldn’t have told the story, but also emphasize that it’s not like anyone in the class knows who you are. The friend admits they are wrong, but also downplays the potential consequences of the inappropriate disclosure of your story.

Entitlements and Enhancements

The fourth type of impression management tactic is the use of entitlements and enhancements. Entitlements and enhancements are “designed to explain a desirable event in a way that maximizes the desirable implications for the actor.”³¹ Primarily, “entitlements are designed to maximize an actor’s apparent responsibility for an event; enhancements are designed to maximize the favorability of an event itself.”³² In this case, the goal is to make oneself look even better than maybe they actually are.

For our examples, let’s look at entitlements and enhancements separately. For an example of an entitlement, imagine that you’re talking to a new peer in class and they tell you about how they single-handedly organized a wildly popular concert that happened over the weekend. Here, the individual is trying to maximize their responsibility to ensure they look good.

For example, consider an enhancement where, in the same scenario, the individual talks less about how they managed the event single-handedly and more about how amazing the event itself was. Here, they’re aligning themselves with the event, so the more amazing the event looks, the better you’ll perceive them as an individual.

Flattery

The fifth impression management tactic is the use of flattery, or the use of compliments to increase the other person’s liking for you. Here, if you flatter someone, they will perceive you in a more favorable light. Imagine there’s a new player on your basketball team. Almost immediately, they compliment you on your form and how they wish they could be as good as you are. In this case, the person may be completely honest, but the use of flattery will probably get you to see that person more positively as well.

Favors

The last tactic that researchers have described for impression management is favors. Favors “involve doing something nice for someone to gain that person’s approval.”³³ One way that we get others to like us is to do things for them. If we want our peers in class to like us, then maybe we’ll

share our notes with them when they're absent. We could also volunteer to let someone use our washer and dryer if they don't have one. There are many ways we can show kindness to others. Although most of us don't think of favors as tactics for managing how people perceive us, they have a result that does.

Social Penetration Theory

In 1973, Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor were interested in understanding how individuals become closer to one another.³⁴ They believed that the method of self-disclosure was similar to social penetration and hence created the **social penetration theory**. This theory helps to explain how individuals gradually become more intimate, based on their communication behavior. According to the social penetration theory, relationships begin when individuals share non-intimate layers of personal information and progress to more intimate layers.³⁵

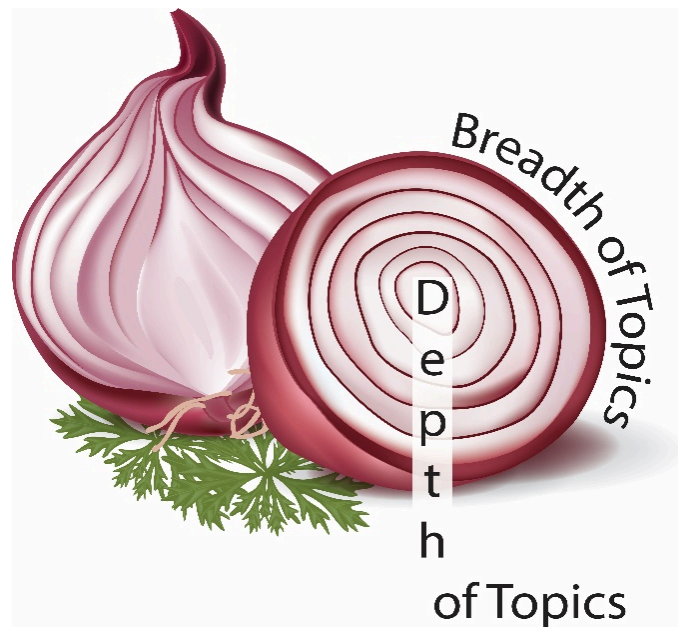


Figure 7.2 Social Penetration Theory

Altman and Taylor believed individuals discover more about others through self-disclosure. How people comprehend others on a deeper level also helps us gain a better understanding of ourselves. The researchers believe that penetration happens gradually. The scholars describe their theory visually, like an onion with many rings or levels.³⁶ A person's personality is like an onion because it has many layers (Figure 7.2). We have an outer layer everyone can see (e.g., hair color or height), and we have very personal layers that people cannot see (e.g., our dreams and career aspirations). Three factors affect what people choose to disclose. The first is personal characteristics (e.g., introverted or extraverted). The second is the possibility of any reward or cost with disclosing to the other person (e.g., information might have repercussions if the receiver does not like or agree with you). And the third is the situational context (e.g., telling your romantic partner you want to end the relationship on your wedding day).

When people first meet each other, they start from their outer rings and drift toward the core. Researchers described how people typically go through various stages to become closer. In the orientation stage, people typically discuss very superficial matters, such as the weather. Next comes the exploratory affective stage, where people will disclose more about their feelings on normal topics, such as favorite foods or movies. Many of our friendships remain at this stage. At the affective stage, people engage in more private issues that are more personal in nature. During the stable stage, people will share their most intimate details. A final stage is not obligatory and does not happen in every relationship—the depenetration stage, where people decrease their disclosures.

Social penetration theory encompasses two distinct aspects. The first aspect is breadth, which refers to the range of topics individuals are willing to discuss with others. For instance, some people do not like to talk about religion and politics because it is inappropriate. The second aspect is depth, which refers to how deeply a person will go in discussing certain topics. For example, some people don't mind sharing information about themselves regarding their favorite things. Still, they may not share their most private thoughts about themselves because it is too personal. The researchers believe that by self-disclosing to others both in breadth and depth, then it could lead to more relational closeness.

Johari Window

The name “Johari” is a combination of the two researchers who originated the concept: Joseph Luft (Jo) and Harrington Ingham (hari).³⁷ The basic idea behind the Johari Window is that we build trust in our interpersonal relationships as we self-disclose, revealing information about ourselves, and we learn more about ourselves as we receive feedback from the people with whom we are interacting. As shown in Figure 7.3, the Johari Window is represented by four window panes. Two window panes refer to ourselves, and two refer to others. First, when discussing ourselves, we have to be aware that some things about ourselves are known to us, and others are not. For example, we may be completely aware of the fact that we are extraverted and love talking to people (known to self). However, we may not be aware of how others tend to view our extraversion as positive or negative (unknown to self). The second part of the window is what is known to others and unknown to others. For example, some common information known to others includes your height, weight, hair color, etc. At the same time, there is a bunch of information that people don't know about us: deepest desires, joys, goals in life, etc. Ultimately, the Johari Window breaks this into four different quadrants (Figure 7.3).

Open Self

The first quadrant of the Johari Window is the open self, or when information is known to both ourselves and others. Although some facets are automatically known, others become known as we disclose more and more information about ourselves with others. As we get to know people and self-disclose and increasingly deeper levels, the open self quadrant grows. For the purposes of thinking about discussions and self-disclosures, the open self is where the bulk of this work ultimately occurs.

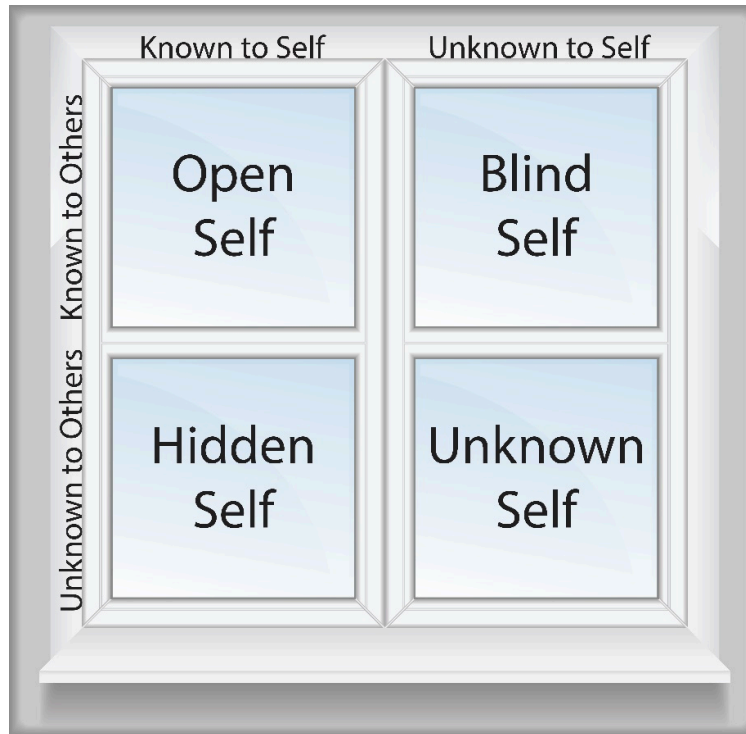


Figure 7.3 Johari Window

Information in the open self can include your attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, emotions/feelings, experiences, and values that are known to both the person and to others. For example, if you wear a religious symbol around your neck (Christian Cross, Jewish Star of David, Islamic Crescent Moon and Star, etc.), people will be able to ascertain certain facts about your religious beliefs immediately. If you have stickers on your laptop or phone, people will make associations about you based on these artifacts. They might assume that you like or support a certain character or business depending on your sticker.

Hidden Self

The second quadrant is what is known to ourselves but is not known to others. We all have personal information that we may not feel compelled to share with others. For example, if you are dreaming about going to Italy. It might not be something that someone can tell when looking at you. Your closest friends might not even know your desires to travel to Italy. Hence, this is a secret that you have kept to yourself and have not told others possibly out of fear (e.g., financial worries, international security, language concerns).

Think about your own life, what types of things do you keep hidden from others? One of the reasons we keep things hidden is because it's hard to open ourselves up to being vulnerable. Typically, the hidden self will decrease as a relationship grows. However, if someone ever violates our trust and discusses our hidden self with others, we are less likely to keep disclosing this information in the future. If the trust violation is extreme enough, we may discontinue that relationship altogether.

Blind Self

The third quadrant is called the blind self because it's what we don't know about ourselves that is known by others. For example, during an initial interaction, we may not be aware of how the other person is reacting to us. We may think that we're coming across as friendly, but the other person may perceive us as shy or even pushy. One way to decrease the blind self is by soliciting feedback from others. As others reveal more of our blind selves, we can become more self-aware of how others perceive us.

One problem with the blind self is that how people view us and how we view ourselves can often be radically different. For example, people may perceive you as cocky, but in reality, you're scared to death. Another example, could be the reverse of the previous example. Let's say you have tons of experience sky-diving, but your friends have never been. Hence, you might appear scared, but in reality you are confident because you have done this before and you don't want to make your friends feel uncomfortable for being nervous. It's important to decrease the blind self during our interactions with others, because how people view us will determine how they interact with us.

Unknown Self

Lastly, we have the unknown self, which refers to information that is not known by ourselves or others. The unknown self can include aptitudes/talents, attitudes/feelings, behaviors, capabilities, etc. that are unknown to us or others. For example, you may have a natural talent for playing the piano. Still, if you've never sat down in front of a piano, neither you nor others would have any way of knowing that you have the aptitude/talent for playing the piano. Sometimes parts of the unknown self are just under the surface and will arise with time and in the right contexts, but other times no one will ever know these unknown parts.

One other area that can affect the unknown self involves prior experiences. It's possible that you experienced a traumatic event that closes you down in a specific area. For example, imagine that you are an amazing writer, but someone, when you were in the fourth grade, made fun of a story you wrote, so you never tried writing again. Here, the aptitude/talent for writing has been suppressed because of that one traumatic experience as a child. Sadly, many of us likely possess a range of aptitudes/talents, attitudes/feelings, behaviors, and capabilities that were hindered or suppressed because of traumas experienced throughout our lives.

Key Takeaways

- People self-disclose for two primary motives:
 - Social integration—building interpersonal relationships by finding common ground and reducing uncertainty.
 - Impression management—shaping how others perceive us using techniques like:
 - Self-descriptions (highlighting positive traits)

- Accounts (explaining problematic behavior)
- Apologies (admitting fault while softening impact)
- Entitlements and enhancements (amplifying our contributions or positive events)
- Flattery (offering compliments to gain favor)
- Favors (doing something nice to earn approval)
- The process of self-disclosure is influenced by various factors, including personality, culture, emotional state, biological sex, psychological gender, social status differences, environment, physical contact, and the communication medium.
- The consequences of self-disclosure can include greater liking and relational intimacy, but also risks such as rejection or trust violations. The appropriateness of disclosure depends on the context and type of relationship.
- The Johari Window visually represents self-disclosure across four quadrants:
 - Open self—known to self and others (e.g., visible traits, openly shared beliefs)
 - Hidden self—known to self but not to others (e.g., private thoughts or identities)
 - Blind self—unknown to self but known to others (e.g., mannerisms, how you're perceived)
 - Unknown self—unknown to both self and others (e.g., untapped potential or suppressed traits)

Exercises

1. Create a self-penetration diagram for yourself. What topics are you open to talking about? What are you not willing to discuss? Then compare your work with that of another student in class. How were you similar or dissimilar? Why do you think these differences/similarities exist?
2. Think of a time when you've used the six different impression management techniques. How effective were you with each technique? What could you have done differently?
3. Draw your own Johari Window. Fill in each of the window panes with a topic of self-disclosure. You will probably need to ask a close friend or family member to help you with the unknown self pane. Why did you put what you put? Does it make sense? Why?

Listening

Learning Objectives

1. Differentiate between hearing and listening, including subtypes such as critical listening.
2. Describe the stages of the HURIER model of listening and explain how each contributes to mindful communication.
3. Identify and explain the five types of listening in the Wolvin and Coakley taxonomy.
4. Compare and contrast the four primary listening styles and reflect on how personal style influences interpersonal effectiveness.
5. Apply the HEAR method to demonstrate mindful listening in real-world conversations.

When it comes to daily communication, we spend about 45% of our time listening, 30% speaking, 16% reading, and 9% writing.³⁸ However, most people are not entirely sure what the word “listening” is or how to do it effectively.

Hearing Is Not Listening

Hearing refers to a passive activity where an individual perceives sound by detecting vibrations through an ear. Hearing is a physiological process that occurs continuously. We are constantly bombarded by sounds. Unless you are in a soundproof room or are 100% deaf, you are constantly hearing sounds. Even in a soundproof room, other sounds that are normally not heard, such as a beating heart or breathing, become more apparent because of the blocked background noise. In Minneapolis, Minnesota, Orfield Laboratories houses what is considered the world’s most silent space—an anechoic chamber. The room absorbs sound waves, preventing them from bouncing around. This specially designed room creates such profound silence that visitors hear sounds from their body they normally cannot detect: the rhythm of their pulse, the circulation of blood, the blinking of their eyes, etc.³⁹ One [YouTuber](#), Callum McGinley, holds the World Record for time spent in an anechoic chamber at London’s South Bank University. He lasted a mindboggling 86 minutes. And the chamber in London is actually “louder” than the one in the United States. Time in an anechoic chamber is a level of hearing that most of us will never experience.

Listening is seen as an active process. Listening is “focused, concentrated attention for the purpose of understanding the meanings expressed by a [source].”⁴⁰ From this perspective, hearing is more of an automatic response when your ear perceives information; whereas, listening is what happens when we purposefully attend to different messages.

We can even take this a step further and differentiate normal listening from critical listening. **Critical listening** is the “careful, systematic thinking and reasoning to see whether a message makes sense considering evidence.”⁴¹ From this perspective, it’s one thing to attend to someone’s message, but something very different to analyze what the person is saying based on known facts and evidence.

Let’s apply these ideas to a typical interpersonal situation. Let’s say that you and your best friend are having dinner at a crowded restaurant. Your ear is constantly attending to a multitude of messages in that environment. Still, most of those messages get filtered out as “background noise,” or information we don’t consciously listen to or cannot hear outside of specialized conditions, such as an anechoic chamber. Maybe then your favorite song comes on the speaker system the restaurant is playing, and you and your best friend both attend to the song because you both like it. A minute earlier, another song could have been playing, but you tuned it out (hearing) instead of taking a moment to enjoy and attend to the song itself (listen). Next, let’s say you and your friend get into a discussion about the issues of campus parking. Your friend states, “There’s never any parking on campus. What gives?” Now, if you’re listening critically to what your friend says, you’ll question the basis of this argument. For example, the word “never” in this statement is problematic because it implies that the campus has no parking, which is probably not the case. Now, it may be difficult for your friend to find a parking spot on campus, but that doesn’t mean that there’s “never any parking.” Here, you’ve gone from just listening to critically evaluating the argument your friend is making.

Model of Listening

Judi Brownell created one of the most commonly used models for listening.⁴² Although not the only model of listening that exists, we like this model because it breaks hearing down into clearly differentiated stages: hearing, understanding, remembering, interpreting, evaluating, and responding (Figure 7.4).

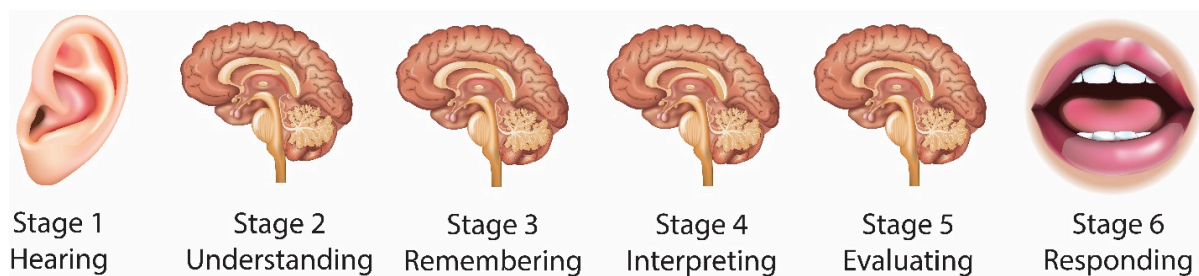


Figure 7.4 HURIER Model of Listening

Hearing

From a fundamental perspective, for listening to occur, an individual must attend to some communicated message. Now, perhaps hearing should not be equated with listening (as we did above), but it is the first step in the listening model. If we don’t attend to the message at all, then communication never occurred from the receiver’s perspective.

Imagine you're standing in a crowded bar with your friends on a Friday night. You see your friend Darry and yell her name. In that instant, you, as the source of a message, have attempted to send a message. If Darry is too far away, or if the bar is too loud and she doesn't hear you call her name, then Darry has not engaged in stage one of the listening model. You may have tried to initiate communication, but the receiver, Darry, was unaware that you had initiated it.

To engage in mindful listening, it's essential to take hearing seriously because of the importance of intention. If we enter an interaction with another person without truly intending to listen to what they have to say, we may end up being a passive listener who does nothing more than hear and nod our heads. Remember, mindful communication begins with the premise that we must consider our intentions and be aware of them.

Understanding

The second stage of the listening model is understanding, which involves comprehending or decoding the source's message. When we discussed the basic models of human communication in [Chapter 2](#), we discussed the idea of decoding a message. Decoding is the process of breaking down a message into its comprehensible meanings. For example, imagine someone coming up to you asking if you know, "Tintinnabulation of vacillating pendulums in inverted, metallic resonant cups." Even if you recognize all of the words, you may not completely comprehend what the person is even trying to say. Here, you cannot decode the message. Just as an FYI, that means "jingle bells."

Remembering

Once we've decoded a message, we must remember the message itself, or recall the message that was sent. We are bombarded by messages throughout our day, so it's completely possible to attend to a message, decode it, then forget about it within two seconds.

For example, I always warn my students that my brain is like a sieve. If you tell me something when I'm leaving the class, I could easily have forgotten what you told me three seconds later because my brain switches gear to what I'm doing next: I run into another student in the hallway; another thought pops into my head; etc. As such, I always recommend emailing me important things, so I don't forget them. In this case, it's not that I don't understand the message; I just get distracted, and my remembering process fails me. This problem plagues all of us.

Interpreting

The next stage in the HURIER Model of Listening is interpreting. "Interpreting messages involves attention to all of the various speaker and contextual variables that provide a background for accurately perceived messages."⁴³ So, what do we mean by contextual variables? A significant part of the interpreting process involves being aware of the nonverbal cues (both oral and physical) that accompany a message, allowing for the accurate assignment of meaning.

Imagine you're having a conversation with one of your peers, and he says, "I love math." The text itself demonstrates overwhelming joy and involves calculating mathematical problems. However, if the message is accompanied by an eye roll or is said in a manner that makes it sound sarcastic, then

the meaning of the oral phrase changes. Part of interpreting a message, then, is being sensitive to nonverbal cues.

Evaluating

The next stage is the evaluating stage, or judging the message itself. One of the biggest hurdles many people have with listening is the evaluative stage. Our personal biases, values, and beliefs can hinder our ability to listen to someone else's message effectively.

Let's imagine that you despise a specific politician. It's gotten to where if you hear this politician's voice, you immediately change the television channel. Even hearing other people talk about this politician causes you to tune out completely. Here, your own bias against this politician prevents you from effectively listening to their message or even others' messages involving this politician. Overcoming our own biases against the source or content of a message in order to truly listen is not easy. One reason listening is a challenging process is that it involves our inherent desire to evaluate people and ideas.

When evaluating another person's message, it's essential to be mindful. As we discussed in [Chapter 1](#), to be a mindful communicator, you must listen with an open ear that is non-judging. Too often, we evaluate others' messages with an analytical or cold quality that is antithetical to being mindful.

Responding

In Figure 7.4, hearing is represented by an ear, the brain represents the next four stages, and a person's mouth represents the final stage. It's essential to recognize that effective listening begins with the ear and centers in the brain, and only then should someone provide feedback on the message itself. Often, people jump from hearing and understanding to responding, which can cause problems as they jump to conclusions that have arisen by truncated interpretation and evaluation.

Ultimately, how we respond to a source's message will determine how the rest of the interaction progresses. If we outright dismiss what someone is saying, we put up a roadblock that says, "I don't want to hear anything else." On the other hand, if we nod our heads and say, "tell me more," then we are encouraging the speaker to continue the interaction. For effective communication to occur, it's essential to consider how our responses will impact the other person and our relationship with them.

Overall, when it comes to being a mindful listener, it's essential to remember the acronym COAL: curiosity, openness, acceptance, and love.⁴⁴ We need to go into our interactions with others and try to see things from their points of view. When we engage in COAL, we can listen mindfully and be in the moment.

Taxonomy of Listening

Now that we've introduced the basic concepts of listening, let's examine a simple taxonomy of listening that was created by Andrew Wolvin and Carolyn Coakley.⁴⁵ The basic premise of the Wolvin

and Coakley taxonomy of listening is that there are fundamental parts to listening and then higher-order aspects of listening (Figure 7.5). Let's look at each of these parts separately.

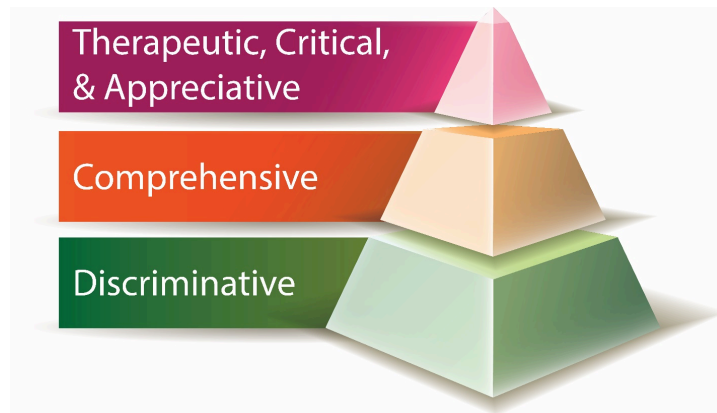


Figure 7.5 Taxonomy of Listening

Discriminative

The base level of listening is what Wolvin and Coakley called discriminative listening, or distinguishing between auditory and visual stimuli and determining which to actually pay attention to. Discriminative listening focuses on how the perception of a wide range of different stimuli can be filtered and utilized.

We're constantly bombarded with a variety of messages in our day-to-day lives. We have to discriminate between which messages we want to pay attention to and which ones we won't. As a metaphor, think of discrimination as your email inbox. Every day, you filter out messages (aka spam) to find the messages you want to actually read. In the same way, our brains are constantly bombarded with messages, and we have to filter some in and most of them out.

Comprehensive

If we achieve discriminative listening, then we can progress to comprehensive listening. "Comprehensive listening requires the listener to use the discriminative skills while functioning to understand and recall the speaker's information."⁴⁶ If we go back and look at Figure 7.4, we can see that comprehensive listening essentially aligns with understanding and remembering.

Wolvin and Coakley argued that discriminative and comprehensive listening are foundational levels of listening. If these foundational levels of listening are met, then they can progress to the other three, higher-order levels of listening: therapeutic, critical, and appreciative.

Therapeutic

Therapeutic listening occurs when an individual is a sounding board for another person during an interaction. For example, your best friend just fought with their significant other and they've come to you to talk through the situation.

Critical

The next aspect of listening is critical listening, which involves analyzing the message being sent. Instead of being a passive receiver of information, the essential goal of listening is to determine the acceptability or validity of the message(s) being sent.

Appreciative

Last, we have appreciative listening, which is when someone simply enjoys the act of listening or the message being sent. For example, let's say you're watching a Broadway musical, play, or even a new movie at the cinema. While you may be engaged critically, you may also be simply appreciative and enjoy the act of listening to the message.

Listening Styles

Now that we have a better understanding of how listening works, let's talk about the four different styles of listening researchers have identified. Kittie Watson, Larry Barker, and James Weaver defined listening styles as "attitudes, beliefs, and predispositions about the how, where, when, who, and what of the information reception and encoding process."⁴⁷ Watson et al. identified four distinct listening styles: people, content, action, and time. Before proceeding to learn about the different listening styles, take a moment to complete the Listening Style Questionnaire. The Listening Style Questionnaire is based on the original work of Watson et al.⁴⁸

Listening Style Questionnaire

Instructions: Read the following questions and select the answer that corresponds with how you listen to public speeches. Do not be concerned if some items appear similar. Please use the scale below to rate the degree to which each statement applies to you:

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

_____1. I am very attuned to public speaker's emotions while listening to them.

_____2. I keep my attention on a public speaker's feelings why they speak.

_____3. I listen for areas of similarity and difference between me and a public speaker.

_____4. I generally don't pay attention to a speaker's emotions.

_____5. When listening to a speaker's problems, I find myself very attentive.

_____6. I prefer to listen to people's arguments while they are speaking.

- _____7. I tend to tune out technical information when a speaker is speaking.
- _____8. I wait until all of the arguments and evidence is presented before judging a speaker's message.
- _____9. I always fact check a speaker before forming an opinion about their message.
- _____10. When it comes to public speaking, I want a speaker to keep their opinions to themselves and just give me the facts.
- _____11. A speaker needs to get to the point and tell me why I should care.
- _____12. Unorganized speakers drive me crazy.
- _____13. Speakers need to stand up, say what they need to say, and sit down.
- _____14. If a speaker wants me to do something, they should just say it directly.
- _____15. When a speaker starts to ramble on, I really start to get irritated.
- _____16. I have a problem listening to someone give a speech when I have other things to do, places to be, or people to see.
- _____17. When I don't have time to listen to a speech, I have no problem telling someone.
- _____18. When someone is giving a speech, I'm constantly looking at my watch or clocks in the room.
- _____19. I avoid speeches when I don't have the time to listen to them.
- _____20. I have no problem listening to a speech even when I'm in a hurry.

Scoring:

People-Oriented Listener: $6 - (\text{scores for item 4}) + (\text{scores for items 1, 2, 3, 5})$

Content-Oriented Listener: $6 - (\text{scores for item 7}) + (\text{scores for items 6, 8, 9, 10})$

Action-Oriented Listener: Add the scores for items 11, 12, 13, 14, 15

Time-Oriented Listener: $12 - (\text{scores for items 18 \& 20}) + (\text{scores for items 16, 17, 19})$

Interpretation:

For each of the four subscales, scores should be between 5 and 25. If your score is above 18, you are considered to have high levels of that specific listening style. If your score is below 12, you're considered to have low levels of that specific listening style.

Based On:

Watson, K. W., Barker, L. L., & Weaver, J. B., III. (1992, March). *Development and validation of the Listener Preference Profile* [Paper presentation]. International Listening Association in Seattle, WA, United States.

The Four Listening Styles

People

The first listening style is the people-oriented listening style. People-oriented listeners are more focused on the person sending the message than the content of the message. As such, people-oriented listeners focus on the emotional states of senders of information. One way to think about people-oriented listeners is to view them as highly compassionate, empathetic, and sensitive, which enables them to put themselves in the shoes of the person sending the message.

People-oriented listeners often excel in helping professions where listening to the person and understanding their feelings is crucial (e.g., therapists, counselors, social workers). They are also highly focused on maintaining relationships, making them adept at casual conversation where they can genuinely engage with the person.

Action

The second listening style is the action-oriented listener. Action-oriented listeners are focused on what the source wants to convey. The action-oriented listener wants a source to get to the point quickly. Instead of long, drawn-out lectures, the action-oriented speaker would prefer concise bullet points that get to the point of what the source desires. Action-oriented listeners “tend to preference speakers that construct organized, direct, and logical presentations.”⁴⁹

When dealing with an action-oriented listener, it’s essential to recognize that they want you to be logical and concise. One thing action-oriented listeners commonly do is search for errors and inconsistencies in someone’s message, so it’s important to be organized and have your facts straight.

Content

The third type of listener is the content-oriented listener, who focuses on the content of the message and processes it systematically. Of the four different listening styles, content-oriented listeners are more adept at listening to complex information. Content-oriented listeners “believe it is important to listen fully to a speaker’s message prior to forming an opinion about it (while action listeners become frustrated if the speaker is ‘wasting time’).”⁵⁰

When it comes to analyzing messages, content-oriented listeners are primarily interested in examining the message itself. They want as much information as possible in order to make the best evaluation of the message. As such, “they want to look at the time, the place, the people, the who, the what, the where, the when, the how ... all of that. They don’t want to leave anything out.”⁵¹

Time

The final listening style is the time-oriented listening style. Time-oriented listeners are sometimes referred to as “clock watchers” because they’re always in a hurry and want a source of a message to speed things up a bit. Time-oriented listeners “tend to verbalize the limited amount of time they are willing or able to devote to listening and are likely to interrupt others and openly signal disinterest.”⁵²

They often feel overwhelmed by the numerous tasks that need to be completed (whether real or not), so they usually try to accomplish multiple tasks while listening to a source. Of course, multitasking often leads to someone’s attention being divided, and information being missed.

Research Spotlight



In 2020, Leslie Ramos Salazar conducted a study examining the relationship between the listening style preferences of chronically ill patients and their medical communication competence during patient-doctor interactions. Medical communication competence involves four key components: information giving (sharing symptoms and medical history), information seeking (asking questions), information verifying (confirming understanding), and socioemotional communication (expressing emotions and building trust with physicians).⁵³ The researcher surveyed 522 self-identified chronically ill patients using the Listening Styles Profile (LSP-16) to assess their preferences for the four listening styles, and participants also completed the Medical Communication Competence Scale to evaluate their communication skills with physicians.

The study revealed a significant relationship between listening styles and medical communication competence. People who listened and those who listened to time were positively associated with information giving, meaning patients with these preferences were more likely to effectively share health information with their doctors. For information seeking, people listening, content listening, and time listening all showed positive relationships, whereas action listening was negatively associated with seeking information from physicians. Regarding information verifying, people listening and time listening showed positive associations, but action listening was negatively related to patients’ ability to confirm their understanding of medical information. For socioemotional communication, people listening, content listening, and time listening were all positive predictors. In contrast, action listening was inversely related to patients’ ability to express emotions and build trusting relationships with their physicians. These findings suggest that different listening style preferences can significantly impact how effectively patients communicate in medical settings, with action

listening consistently showing negative associations across most dimensions of communication competence.

Thinking About the Four Listening Types

Kina Mallard broke down the four listening styles and examined some of the common positive characteristics, negative characteristics, and strategies for communicating with the different listening styles (Tables 7.1 to 7.4).⁵⁴

Table 7.1 Understanding People-Oriented Listeners

Positive Characteristics	Negative Characteristics	Strategies for Communicating with People-Oriented Listeners
Show care and concern for others	Over involved in feelings of others	Use stories and illustrations to make points
Are non-judgmental	Avoid seeing faults in others	Use “we” rather than “I” in conversations
Provide clear verbal and nonverbal feedback signals	Internalize/adopt emotional states of others	Use emotional examples and appeals
Are interested in building relationships	Are overly expressive when giving feedback	Show some vulnerability when possible
Notice others’ moods quickly	Are nondiscriminating in building relationships	Use self-effacing humor or illustrations

Table 7.2 Understanding Action-Oriented Listeners

Positive Characteristics	Negative Characteristics	Strategies for Communicating with Action-Oriented Listeners
Get to the point quickly	Tend to be impatient with rambling speakers	Keep main points to three or fewer
Give clear feedback concerning expectations	Jump ahead and reach conclusions quickly	Keep presentations short and concise
Concentrate on understanding task	Jump ahead or finishes thoughts of speakers	Have a step-by-step plan and label each step
Help others focus on what’s important	Minimize relationship issues and concerns	Watch for cues of disinterest and pick up vocal pace at those points or change subjects
Encourage others to be organized and concise	Ask blunt questions and appear overly critical	Speak at a rapid but controlled rate

Table 7.3 Understanding Content-Oriented Listeners

Positive Characteristics	Negative Characteristics	Strategies for Communicating with Content-Oriented Listeners
Value technical information	Are overly detail oriented	Use two-side arguments when possible
Test for clarity and understanding	May intimidate others by asking pointed questions	Provide hard data when available
Encourage others to provide support for their ideas	Minimize the value of nontechnical information	Quote credible experts
Welcome complex and challenging information	Discount information from nonexperts	Suggest logical sequences and plan
Look at all sides of an issue	Take a long time to make decisions	Use charts and graphs

Table 7.4 Understanding Time-Oriented Listeners

Positive Characteristics	Negative Characteristics	Strategies for Communicating with Time-Oriented Listeners
Manage and save time	Tend to be impatient with time wasters	Ask how much time the person has to listen
Set time guidelines for meeting and conversations	Interrupt others	Try to go under time limits when possible
Let others know listening-time requirements	Let time affect their ability to concentrate	Be ready to cut out necessary examples and information
Discourage wordy speakers	Rush speakers by frequently looking at watches/clock	Be sensitive to nonverbal cues indicating impatience or a desire to leave
Give cues to others when time is being wasted	Limit creativity in others by imposing time pressures	Get to the bottom line quickly

Original Source: Mallard, K. S. (1999). Lending an ear: The chair's role as listener. *The Department Chair*, 9(3), 1–13. Used with Permission from the Author.

Hopefully, this section has helped you gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of listening. We should mention that many people are not just one listening style or another. It's possible to be a combination of different listening styles. However, some of the listening style combinations are more common. For example, someone who is action-oriented and time-oriented will want the bare-bones information so they can make a decision. On the other hand, it's hard to be a people-oriented listener and a time-oriented listener because being empathic and attending to someone's feelings takes time and effort.

Adding to the complexity of listening, a recent study exploring how couples actually listened during trouble-talks, researchers found that couples rarely engaged in the type of active listening behaviors that educators and psychologists recommend such as being neutral, open and nonjudgmental. Instead, couples are managing a complex situation in which they manage accountability, blame, and attribution. It was generally thought that active listening maintained good relationships, but there was no evidence in the study that attempts at managing accountability, blame, and attribution would damage the relationship.⁵⁵

Mindfulness Activity

One of the most challenging skills to master in mindfulness is mindful listening. To engage in mindful listening, Elaine Smookler recommends using the HEAR method:

1. HALT — Halt whatever you are doing and offer your full attention.
2. ENJOY — Enjoy a breath as you choose to receive whatever is being communicated to you, wanted or unwanted.
3. ASK — Ask yourself if you really know what they mean, and if you don't, ask for clarification. Instead of making assumptions, bring openness and curiosity to the interaction. You might be surprised at what you discover.
4. REFLECT — Reflect back to them what you heard. This tells them that you were really listening.⁵⁶



For this mindfulness activity, we want you to engage in mindful listening. Start by having a conversation with a friend, romantic partner, or family member. Before beginning the conversation, find a location that has minimal distractions, so try not to engage in this activity in a public space. Also, turn off the television and radio. The goal is to focus your attention on the other person. Start by employing the HEAR method for listening during your conversation. After you have finished this conversation, try to answer the following questions:

1. How easily did you provide your conversational partner with your full attention? When stray thoughts entered your head, how did you refocus yourself?
2. Were you able to pay attention to your breathing while engaged in this conversation? Were you breathing lightly or heavily? Did your breathing impede your ability to listen mindfully? If yes, what happened?
3. Did you attempt to empathize with your conversational partner? How easy was it to understand where they were coming from? Was it still easy to empathize if you didn't agree with something they said or didn't like something they said?
4. How did your listening style affect your ability to stay mindful while listening? Do

you think all four listening styles are suited for mindful listening? Why?

Key Takeaways

- Hearing is a passive physiological process in which the ear detects sound. Listening, by contrast, is an active and intentional process, requiring concentration to interpret meaning.
- The HURIER Model of listening includes six stages:
 - Hearing—attending to auditory stimuli
 - Understanding—decoding the message
 - Remembering—retaining the information
 - Interpreting—considering nonverbal/contextual cues
 - Evaluating—judging the message’s logic or value
 - Responding—providing appropriate feedback to the speaker
- The Wolvin and Coakley taxonomy outlines five types of listening:
 - Discriminative—filtering relevant stimuli from background noise
 - Comprehensive—understanding and recalling the speaker’s content
 - Therapeutic—supporting emotional expression
 - Critical—assessing the accuracy and logic of messages
 - Appreciative—enjoying the listening experience for its own sake
- The four listening styles are:
 - People-oriented—focuses on empathy and relationships
 - Action-oriented—values direct, organized, goal-focused messages
 - Content-oriented—prefers detail-rich, well-supported arguments
 - Time-oriented—prioritizes efficiency and brevity
- The HEAR method fosters mindful listening through:
 - Halt—stop and give full attention
 - Enjoy—breathe and stay present
 - Ask—seek clarification instead of assuming
 - Reflect—paraphrase to confirm understanding

Exercises

1. Take the online hearing test. Visit: [Hearing Test](#) or [Audiogram](#) on the MED-EL website. These are online tests. You should always consult a licensed audiologist if you have concerns about hearing loss.
2. For the next week, do a listening diary. Take notes of all the things you listen to and analyze to see if you are truly a good listener. Do you ask people to repeat things? Do you paraphrase?
3. After completing the Listening Styles Questionnaire, reflect on your listening style and how it influences your interactions with others. What should you think about when communicating with people who have a different listening style?

Listening Responses

Learning Objectives

1. Identify and describe the eight types of listening responses: silent listening, questioning, paraphrasing, empathizing, supporting, analyzing, evaluating, and advising.
2. Differentiate between sincere and counterfeit questions, and explain five purposes of questioning in interpersonal communication.
3. Demonstrate understanding of paraphrasing by distinguishing its three forms and describing appropriate contexts for use.
4. Explain the purpose of perception checking and apply its three-step process to clarify ambiguous behaviors and reduce miscommunication.
5. Analyze how personal, social, and cultural influences shape perception and affect listening responses.

Who do you think is a skilled listener? Why did you name that person? How can you tell that person is a good listener? You probably recognize a good listener based on the nonverbal and verbal cues that they display. In this section, we will discuss different listening responses. We don't all listen in the same way. Additionally, each situation is unique and requires a distinct approach that is tailored to that specific circumstance.

Types of Listening Responses

Ronald Adler, Lawrence Rosenfeld, and Russell Proctor are three interpersonal scholars who have made significant contributions to the study of listening.⁵⁷ Based on their research, they have found different types of listening responses: silent listening, questioning, paraphrasing, empathizing, supporting, analyzing, evaluating, and advising (Figure 7.6).⁵⁸

Silent Listening	
Questioning	Asking questions to understand the situation better.
Paraphrasing	Rephrasing in your own words what the speaker said.
Empathizing	Putting yourself in the same situation to understand what the speaker means.
Supporting	Showing that you endorse the speaker.
Analyzing	Considering possible solutions to what the speaker has said.
Evaluating	Assessing the best courses of action.
Advising	Counseling, recommending, and offering information that will help the speaker.

Figure 7.6. Types of Listening Responses

Silent Listening

Silent listening occurs when you say nothing. It is ideal in certain situations and awful in other situations. However, when used correctly, it can be a powerful tool. If misused, you could give the wrong impression to someone. It is appropriate to use when you don't want to encourage more talking. It also shows that you are open to the speaker's ideas.

Sometimes people get angry when someone doesn't respond. They might think that this person is not listening or trying to avoid the situation. But it might be because the person is just trying to gather their thoughts, or perhaps it would be inappropriate to respond. There are certain situations, such as in counseling, where silent listening can be beneficial because it helps the person figure out their feelings and emotions.

Questioning

In situations where you want to gather information, it can be beneficial to use questioning techniques. You can accomplish this in several ways. There are several ways to question in a sincere, nondirective way (see Table 7.5):

Table 7.5 Types of Nondirective Questioning

Reason	Example
To clarify meanings	A young child might mumble something and you want to make sure you understand what they said.
To learn about others' thoughts, feelings, and wants (open/closed questions)	When you ask your partner where they see your relationship going in the next few years.
To encourage elaboration	Nathan says, "That's interesting!" Jonna has to ask him further if he means interesting in a positive or negative way.
To encourage discovery	Ask your parents how they met because you never knew.
To gather more facts and details	Police officers at the scene of the crime will question any witnesses to get a better understanding of what happened.

You might have different types of questions. Sincere questions are those created to find a genuine answer. Counterfeit questions are disguised attempts to send a message, not to receive one. Sometimes, counterfeit questions can cause the listener to be defensive. For instance, if someone asks you, "Tell me how often you used crystal meth." The speaker implies that you have used meth, even though that has not been established. A speaker can use questions that make statements by emphasizing specific words or phrases, stating an opinion or feeling on the subject. They can ask questions that carry hidden agendas, like "Do you have \$5?" because the person would like to borrow that money. Some questions seek "correct" answers. For instance, when a friend says, "Do I look fat?" You probably have a correct or ideal answer. Some questions are based on unchecked assumptions. An example would be, "Why aren't you listening?" This example implies that the person wasn't listening, when in fact they are listening.

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is defined as restating in your own words, the message you think the speaker just sent. There are three types of paraphrasing. First, you can change the speaker's wording to indicate what you think they meant. Second, you can offer an example of what you think the speaker is talking about. Third, you can reflect on the underlying theme of a speaker's remarks. Paraphrasing represents mindful listening in the way that you are trying to analyze and understand the speaker's information. Paraphrasing can be used to summarize facts and to gain consensus in essential discussions. This could be used in a business meeting to ensure that all details are discussed and agreed upon. Paraphrasing can also be used to understand personal information more accurately. Think about being in a counselor's office. Counselors often paraphrase information to better understand exactly how you are feeling and to analyze the information more effectively.

Empathizing

Empathizing is used to show that you identify with a speaker's information. You are not empathizing when you deny others the rights to their feelings. Examples of this are statements such as, "It's really not a big deal" or "Who cares?" This suggests that the listener is attempting to evoke a different emotional response from the speaker. In minimizing the significance of the situation, you are interpreting the situation in your perspective and passing judgment.

Supporting

Sometimes, in a discussion, people want to know how you feel about them instead of a reflection on the content. Several types of supportive responses are: agreement, offers to help, praise, reassurance, and diversion. The value of receiving support when faced with personal problems is very important. This has been demonstrated to improve psychological, physical, and relational well-being. To effectively support others, you must meet certain criteria. Make sure that your expression of support is sincere, be sure that the other person can accept your support, and focus on "here and now" rather than "then and there."

Analyzing

Analyzing is helpful in gaining different alternatives and perspectives by offering an interpretation of the speaker's message. However, this can be problematic at times. Sometimes the speaker might not understand your perspective or may become more confused by accepting it. To avoid this, steps must be taken in advance. These include tentatively offering your interpretation rather than presenting it as an absolute fact. By being more sensitive to it, the speaker might feel more comfortable accepting it. You can also ensure that your analysis has a reasonable chance of being accurate. If it were inaccurate, it would leave the person more confused than before. Additionally, ensure that the person will be receptive to your analysis and that your motive for offering is genuinely to help the other person. An analysis offered under any other circumstances is useless.

Evaluating

Evaluating appraises the speaker's thoughts or behavior. The evaluation can be favorable ("That makes sense") or negative (passing judgment). Negative evaluations can be critical or non-critical (constructive criticism). Two conditions offer the best chance for evaluations to be received: if the person with the problem requested an evaluation, and if it is genuinely constructive and not designed as a putdown.

Advising

Advising differs from evaluations. It is not always the best solution and can sometimes be harmful. In order to avoid this, you must make sure four conditions are present: be sure the person is receptive to your suggestions, make sure they are truly ready to accept it, be confident in the correctness of your advice, and be sure the receiver won't blame you if it doesn't work out.

Perception Checking

Perceptions change in a relationship. Initially, people can view others positively (for example, confident, thrifty, funny), then later in the relationship that person changes (arrogant, cheap, childish). The person hasn't changed. Only our perceptions of them have changed. That is why we focus on perception in a communication book because often, our perception affects how we communicate. It also has an impact on what we listen to and how we listen. For instance, when people get married, one person might say, "I love you! I would die for you," then a couple of years later, that same person might say, "I hate you! I am going to kill you!" Their perceptions about the other person will change.⁵⁹

Even when people break up, men typically will think about the physical aspects of the relationship (I gave her a watch, she wasn't that hot) and women will think about the emotional aspects of the relationship (I gave him my heart, I really cared about him.). Perception is an interesting thing because sometimes we think other people have a similar perspective, but as we will see, that is not always the case.

Selection

What we pay attention to varies from one person to another. The first step in the perception process is selection. It determines what things we focus on compared to what things we ignore. What we select to focus on depends on:

1. **Intensity** – if it is bigger, brighter, louder in some way. Think about all the advertisements that you view. If the words are bigger or if the sound is louder, you are more likely to pay attention to it. Advertisers know that intensity is very important to get people to pay attention.
2. **Repetition** – It has been said that to get someone to do something, they have to be told three different ways and three different times. People pay attention to things that repeat because you can remember it easier. In school, we learn to do things over and over again, because it teaches us mastery of a skill.
3. **Differences** – We will pay attention to differences, especially if it is a disparity or dissimilarity to what commonly occurs. Think about changes or adjustments that you had to deal with in life. These transformations made you notice the comparisons. For instance, children who go through a divorce will talk about the differences that they encountered. Children will focus on how things are different and how it is not the same.
4. **Motives/Goals** – We tend to pay attention to things for which have a strong interest or desire. If you love cars, you will probably notice cars more closely than someone else who has no interest in cars. Another example might be if you are single, then you might notice who is married and who is not more than someone in a committed relationship.
5. **Emotions** – Our emotional state has a strong impact on how we view life in general. If we are sad, we will probably notice other sad faces. The same thing happens when we are happy; we will tend to notice other happy people. Our emotions can impact how we feel. If we are angry, we might say things we don't mean and not perceive how we come across to other people.

Organization

The second phase in the perception process is organization, which refers to how we arrange information in our minds. So, once we have selected what information we pay attention to, our minds try to process it. Sometimes, when this occurs, we engage in stereotyping and attribute certain characteristics to a specific set of individuals. We classify or label others based on certain qualities.

Also, when people organize information in their mind, they can engage in punctuation, or establish the effects and causes in communication behavior. It is more useful to realize that a conflict situation can be perceived differently by each person, and it is important to focus on “What can we do to make this situation better?”

Interpretation

The third phase of the perception process is interpretation. In this phase, we try to understand the information or make sense of it. This depends on a few factors:

1. Degree of involvement – If we were in the middle of an accident, we would probably have more information about what happened compared to a bystander. The more involved we are with something, the more we can make sense of what is actually happening. For instance, in cults, members understand the rules and rituals, but an outsider would not, because they are not exposed to them.
2. Relational satisfaction – If we are happy in a relationship, we think that everything is wonderful. However, if you are dissatisfied in the relationship, you might second-guess the behaviors and actions of your partner.
3. Past experiences – If you had an enjoyable experience with a certain company, you might think that everything they do is wonderful. However, if your first experience was horrible, you may think that they are always horrible. In turn, you will interpret that company’s actions as justified because you have already encountered a horrible experience.
4. Assumptions about human behavior – If you believed that most people do not lie, then you would probably be very hurt if someone important to you lied to you. Our assumptions about others help us understand their behaviors and actions. If you had a significant other who cheats on you, you would probably be more suspicious in future interactions with significant others.
5. Expectations – Our behavior is also influenced by our expectations of others. If we expect a party to be fun and it isn’t, then we will be let down. However, if we have no expectations about a party, it may not affect how we feel about it.
6. Knowledge of others – If you know that someone close to you has a health problem, then it will not be a shock if they need medical attention. However, if you had no clue that this person was unhealthy, it would come as a complete surprise. How you interpret a situation is often based on what you know about a certain situation.⁶⁰

Negotiation

The last phase of the perception process is called negotiation. In this phase, people are trying to understand what is happening. People often use narratives or stories to explain and depict their lives.

For instance, a disagreement between a teacher and a student might look very different depending on which perspective you take. The student might perceive themselves as hardworking and very studious. The student thinks they deserve a high grade. However, the teacher might feel that their job is to challenge all students to their highest levels and treat all students fairly. By listening to both sides, we can gain a better understanding of what is happening and what needs to be done in specific situations. Consider car accidents and how police officers must listen to both sides. Police officers have to determine what happened and who is at fault. Sometimes it is not an easy task.

Influences on Perception

All of us don't perceive the same things. One person might find something beautiful, but another person might think it is horrible. When it comes to our perception, there are four primary influences we should understand: physiological, psychological, social, and cultural.

Physiological Influences

Some of the reasons we don't interpret things in the same way are due to physiological differences. Hence, biology impacts what we perceive. In this section, we will discuss the various physiological influences.

1. Senses – Our senses can significantly impact what and where we focus our attention. For instance, if you have a strong sense of smell, you might be more sensitive to a foul-smelling odor compared to someone who cannot smell anything due to sinus problems. Our senses provide us with a unique perception of the world.
2. Age – Age can impact what we perceive. Have you ever noticed that children seem to have so much energy, while the elderly often appear to lack it? Children may perceive that there is so much to do in a day, and the elderly may perceive that there is nothing to do. Our age influences how we think about things.
3. Health – when we are healthy, we have the stamina and endurance to do many things. However, when we are sick, our bodies may be more inclined to rest. Thus, we will perceive a lot of information differently. For instance, when you are healthy, some of your favorite meals will taste really good, but when you are sick, it might not taste so good, because you cannot smell things due to a stuffy nose.
4. Hunger – When you are hungry, it is tough to concentrate on anything except food. Studies have shown that when people are hungry, all they focus on is something to eat.
5. Biological cycles – Some people are “morning larks” and some are “night owls.” In other words, there are peaks where people perform at their highest level. For some individuals, it is late at night, and for others, it is early in the morning. When people perform at their peak times, they are likely to be more perceptive of information. If you are a person who loves getting up early, you would probably dislike night classes because you are unable to absorb as much information as you could if the class were held in the morning.

Psychological Influences

Sometimes the influences on perception are not physiological but psychological. These influences include mood and self-concept. These influences are based in our mind, and we can't detect them in others.

1. **Mood** – Whether we are happy or sad can significantly impact how we perceive the world. For instance, if we are happy, then anything that happens, we might view it more positively.
2. **Self-concept** – If we have a healthy self-concept, we may not be offended if someone makes a negative remark. Yet, if we have a poor self-concept, then we are probably going to be more influenced by negative remarks. The stronger our self-concept is, the more likely it will affect how we perceive other people's communication behaviors toward us.

Social Influences

Social influences include sex and gender roles, as well as occupational roles. These roles can impact our perceptions. Because we hold these roles, we may be more likely to think differently than others in different roles.

1. **Sex and gender roles** – We have certain expectations in our culture regarding how men and women should behave in public. Women are expected to be more nurturing than men. Moreover, men and women are viewed differently in terms of their marital status and age.
2. **Occupational roles** – Our jobs influence how we perceive the world. If you were a lawyer, you might be more inclined to take action on civil cases than your average member of the public, because you know how to handle these kinds of situations. Moreover, if you are a nurse or medical specialist, you are more likely to perceive the health of other individuals. You would be able to tell if someone needed urgent medical care or not.

Research Spotlight



In 2015, Karina J. Lloyd, Diana Boer, Avraham N. Kluger, and Sven C. Voelpel conducted an experiment to examine the relationship between perceived listening trust and well-being. In this study, the researchers recruited pairs of strangers. They had one participant tell the other about a positive experience in their life for seven minutes (the talker) and one who sat and listened to the story without comment (the listener).

The researchers found that talkers who perceived the listener as listening intently found it very important for effective communication. First, perceived listening led to a greater sense of social attraction toward the listener, which in turn, led to a greater sense of trust for the listener. Second, talkers who perceived the listener as listening intently felt their messages were clearer, which led to a greater sense of the talker's overall well-being (positive affect).

As you can see, simply perceiving that the other person is listening intently to you is important on several fronts. For this reason, it's very important to remember to focus your attention when you're listening to someone.

Lloyd, K. J., Boer, D., Kluger, A. N., & Voelpel, S. C. (2015). Building trust and feeling well: Examining intraindividual and interpersonal outcomes and underlying mechanisms of listening. *International Journal of Listening*, 29(1), 12–29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10904018.2014.928211>

Cultural Influences

In a recent meeting, the boss said, “Remember the Golden Rule,” and a coworker from India asked the staff about the meaning of that phrase. He wondered if there was a silver rule or a bronze rule. The reason he didn't understand this concept is due to cultural influences. We know that everyone doesn't perceive things in the same fashion.

In some countries, older adults are highly respected individuals, whom the youth go to for advice and wisdom. Yet, in other countries, older adults are seen as lazy and worthless. Hence, culture affects how we perceive the world and others. Communication is different across cultures. Western cultures, like the United States, value talk and view it as very important to function and conduct business. Thus, they do not like silence because it can be perceived as shyness, frustration, and intimidating.⁶¹ Western culture dislikes silence because it is uncomfortable and problematic. Asian cultures have different perceptions of communication. Silence is seen as valuable for reflecting on one's thinking. Asians may view someone as talkative in a very negative light. Based on this example, we can see that cultural perceptions can lead to problems, as silence is considered rude to an American but acceptable to an Asian. To communicate effectively, we need to understand the cultural perceptions of others.

Perception Checking

To judge others more accurately, we need to engage in perception checking.

Perception checking involves three steps:

1. Describe your perception of the event
2. Offer three different interpretations of that behavior
3. Seek clarification about the interpretations

That's it! I know this sounds easy, but it's definitely much harder than it looks.

Key Takeaways

- The eight types of listening responses—silent listening, questioning, paraphrasing,

empathizing, supporting, analyzing, evaluating, and advising—each serve distinct purposes and should be selected based on the context and the speaker’s needs.

- Sincere questions aim to gather understanding, while counterfeit questions often conceal motives. Questioning can clarify, explore, encourage elaboration, promote discovery, or collect additional details.
- Paraphrasing involves restating, giving examples, or reflecting themes in a speaker’s message to ensure shared understanding. It’s especially useful in emotional or high-stakes conversations.
- Perception checking involves describing behavior, offering three interpretations, and requesting clarification. This process helps reduce misunderstandings and confirms intent.
- Perception is shaped by physiological, psychological, social, and cultural influences, which affect how individuals interpret messages and respond when listening.

Exercises

1. Write an example of each of the listening responses and why it is appropriate for that situation. Why did you write what you did?
2. Create a chart that categorizes the different types of questions and provide at least two examples for each type. Compare with a friend in class.
3. Watch a movie or television show with your friends, then ask them to write the three most notable moments. Compare what you wrote to others. Was it similar or different? Why or why not? Did you all have the same perceptions? Why?

Key Terms

analyzing

appreciative listening

communication motives

communication needs

comprehension listening

conversations

emotional blackmail

empathic listening

empathizing

evaluative listening

hearing

Johari window

listening

paraphrase

self-disclosure
silent listening

social penetration theory

Chapter Wrap-Up

We spend most of our lives engaged in talking and listening behavior. As such, understanding the functions of speaking and listening in interpersonal communication is crucial. In this chapter, we started by discussing the importance of everyday conversations. We next discussed a specific type of talk: disclosing information about ourselves (self-disclosure). We then switched gears and focused on the listening component. Overall, talking and listening are crucial to interpersonal communication, so understanding how they function can help enhance our communication skills.

Chapter Exercises

Real-World Case Study

Microtela is the new leader in telecommunications. However, many customers are having problems with their new cell phones. They have tried calling customer service to solve their problems. However, many customers become frustrated and ultimately terminate their cell phone contracts. Microtela conducts research and discovers that many of its customer service representatives lack effective listening skills. Many of the customers who call the company have complained that no one is listening to their problems.

1. If you were hired as a consultant for this business, how would you fix this problem?
2. How can you teach customer service representatives better listening skills?
3. What are some strategies to help customers feel like they are being listened to?

End-of-Chapter Assessment

1. Kara couldn't wait to talk to her best friend Jose. She's had a truly horrible, no good, very bad day. As soon as Jose enters her apartment, she just starts venting. What type of conversation is Kara having with Jose?
 - a. discourse
 - b. debate
 - c. dialogue
 - d. deviant
 - e. diatribe
2. Cory doesn't know if he is a good cook because he has never been in a kitchen. His friends don't even know if Cory has a kitchen in his house. Which window pane of Johari's window

does this represent?

- a. open
 - b. blind
 - c. hidden
 - d. unknown
 - e. closed
3. All of the following are types of listening except:
- a. silent listening
 - b. questioning
 - c. empathizing
 - d. imagining
 - e. advising
4. In this chapter, we discuss all of the following types of listening except:
- a. comprehension
 - b. evaluative
 - c. empathetic
 - d. appreciative
 - e. interpretive
5. Meno's girlfriend has been seen with other male friends. His friends try and tell him that she is cheating on him, but he refuses to believe what they say. Even when they have pictures and proof, he doesn't listen to their words. He is displaying:
- a. interrupting
 - b. daydreaming
 - c. pseudo-listening
 - d. emotional listening
 - e. insulated listening

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Chapter 8: Building and Maintaining Relationships



“A Man and Woman Posing for a Picture” by [Asso Myron](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Throughout our lives, we will enter and exit many relationships. When it comes to dating, the average person has seven relationships before getting married.¹ According to a study conducted by OnePoll with Evite, the average American has:

- Three best friends
- Five good friends
- Eight people they like but don’t spend one-on-one time with
- 50 acquaintances
- 91 social media friends²

In this chapter, we will discuss how to build and maintain our interpersonal relationships.

The Nature of Relationships

Learning Objectives

1. Identify six key characteristics that define interpersonal relationships.
2. Categorize different relationships based on their primary purpose (work, task, or social).
3. Describe the role of significant relationships in shaping communication behavior.
4. Differentiate between the elements that contribute to a healthy vs. an unhealthy relationship.
5. Evaluate how relationship goals and expectations influence relational satisfaction.

We've all been in a wide range of relationships in our lives. This section will explore relationships by examining specific relationship characteristics and the nature of significant relationships.

Relationship Characteristics

We all know that not all relationships are the same. We have people in our lives that we enjoy spending time with, like to support us, and/or assist us when needed. We will typically distance ourselves from people who do not provide positive feelings or outcomes for us. Thus, there are several key characteristics in relationships, including duration, frequency of contact, sharing, support, interaction variability, and shared goals.³

Some relationships last a lifetime, others last a short period. The length of any relationship is referred to as that relationship's **duration**. People who grew up in small towns might have had the same classmates till graduation. This is because the duration with each person is different. Some people we meet in college are ones we will never see again. Hence, our duration with that person is short. Duration is related to the length of your relationship with that person.

Second, **contact frequency** is how often you communicate with the other person. There are people in our lives we have known for years but only talk to infrequently. The more we communicate with others, the closer our bond becomes to the other person. Sometimes people think duration is the real test of a relationship, but it also depends on how often you communicate with the other person.

The third relationship type is based on **sharing**. The more time we spend with other people and interact with them, the more likely we are to share information about ourselves. This type of sharing involves disclosing information that is usually private and very intimate, including details of our thoughts and feelings. We rarely share this information with strangers. Once we develop a sense of trust and support with this person, we can share more details.

The fourth characteristic is **support**. Think of the people in your life and whom you could call in case of an emergency. The ones that come to mind are the ones you know who would be supportive of you. They would support you if you needed help, money, time, or advice. Support is another type of relationship because we know that not everyone can support us in the same manner. For instance, if you need relationship advice, you would probably pick someone who has relationship knowledge and would support you in your decision. Support is so important. It was found that a major difference between married and dating couples is that married couples were more likely to provide supportive communication behaviors to their partners than dating couples.⁴

The fifth defining characteristic of relationships is the **interaction variability**. When we have a relationship with another person, it is not defined by our interaction with them, but rather by the different conversations we can have with that person. When you were little, you probably knew that if you were to approach your mom, she might respond a certain way as opposed to your dad, who might respond differently. Hence, you knew that your interaction would vary. The same thing happens with your classmates because you don't just talk about class with them. You might also discuss other events on campus or social gatherings. Therefore, our interactions with others are defined by the greater variability that we exhibit with one person compared to another.

The last relationship characteristic is **goals**. In every relationship we enter, we have certain expectations about that relationship. For instance, if your goal is to get closer to another person through communication, you might share your thoughts and feelings, expecting the other person to do the same. If they do not, then you will probably feel like the goals in your relationship were not met because they didn't share information. The same goes for other types of relationships. We typically expect that our significant other will be truthful, supportive, and faithful. If they fail to meet that goal, it can cause problems in the relationship and potentially lead to its end. Hence, in all our relationships, we have goals and expectations about how the relationship will function and operate.

Significant Relationships

Think about all the relationships that you have in your life. Which ones are the most meaningful to you? Why do you consider these relationships to be the most notable ones for you? Your parents/guardians, teachers, friends, family members, and romantic interests can all serve as significant relationships in your life. Significant relationships have a huge impact on our communication behavior and our interpretation of these conversations. Significant relationships impact who we are and help us grow. These relationships can serve various purposes in our lives.

Purposes of Relationships

Relationships can serve a variety of purposes: work, task, and social. First, relationships can be work-related. We might have a significant working relationship that helps us advance our professional careers. We might have work relationships that might support us in gaining financial benefits or better work opportunities. Second, we might have significant relationships because they are task-related. We may have a specific task that we need to accomplish with this other person. It might be a project or a mentorship. After the task is completed, the relationship may come to an end. For

instance, a high school coach may serve in a significant relationship. You and your coach may have a task or plan to attend the state competition. You and your coach will work together to find ways to help you. However, after you complete high school and your task has ended, then you might keep in contact with the coach, or you may not, since your competition (task) has ended. The last purpose is for social reasons. We may have social reasons for pursuing a relationship. These can include pleasure, inclusion, control, and/or affection. Each relationship that we have with another person has a specific purpose. We may like to spend time with a particular friend because we love talking to them. At the same time, we might enjoy spending time with another friend because we know they can help us become more involved in extracurricular activities.

Elements of a Good Relationship

In summary, relationships are meaningful and beneficial. Relationships allow us to grow psychologically, emotionally, and physically. We can connect with others and truly communicate. The satisfaction of our relationships typically determines our happiness and overall well-being.

Key Takeaways

- Relationships vary in duration, frequency of contact, sharing, support, interaction variability, and goals—each of these characteristics helps define the nature and closeness of the relationship.
- Relationships often serve different purposes, such as achieving tasks, fulfilling workplace roles, or meeting social and emotional needs like inclusion or affection.
- Significant relationships (e.g., with parents, close friends, mentors) shape our communication patterns and play an important role in emotional development and identity formation.
- Healthy relationships are built on trust, commitment, empathy, support, emotional regulation, and shared responsibility—key factors that help maintain long-term connection and satisfaction.
- When individuals have aligned or unmet relational goals, it can strongly influence how satisfied or dissatisfied they feel in that relationship, which may affect its longevity and depth.

Exercises

1. Conduct an inventory of your relationships. Consider all the people in your life and how they embody each of the relationship characteristics.

2. Write a list of all the good relationships that you have with others or have witnessed. What makes these relationships good? Is it similar to what we talked about in this chapter? Was anything different? Why?
3. 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.

Relationship Formation

Learning Objectives

1. List and define the three primary types of interpersonal attraction.
2. Identify six common reasons people are drawn to form relationships.
3. Explain how the similarity thesis and complementary relationships influence attraction.
4. Illustrate how disclosure can promote relationship development.
5. Evaluate how social exchange theory applies to decisions about continuing or ending relationships.

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 choose and select the people with whom we form connections and to whom we are attracted. We avoid certain people whom we don't find attractive.

9 Length of Dating Before Marriage Statistics (2025)

DatingAdvice.com shares some interesting statistics about dating and marriage, but concludes that the best timeline is your timeline!

1. Over 70% of couples wait 2 or more years to get married.
2. About 1 in 3 couples wait 5 or more years to get engaged.
3. Dating over 3 years before getting married decreased the odds of divorces by 50%
4. Anyone over 32 increases their risk of divorce by 5% for every year they wait to marry

5. The best age to get married is between 28 and 32
6. The average engagement length is 6 months to 1 year
7. Two-thirds of Married People say living together first is the right move
8. For Mormons, the average age of marriage is 23
9. The average length of dating before marriage varies from 30 to 47 months

Understanding Attraction

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 from one culture to the next. We also know that pop culture can significantly influence what is considered 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 Jenna Ortega, Marsai Martin, or Millie Bobby Brown. 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, compared to the lean, athletic leading men of today (e.g., Jacob Elordi, Tom Holland, and Timothée Chalamet).

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 resources when it comes to the amount of time we have in a given day. We prefer to socialize with people who we think are fun. These people may entertain us or they may fascinate us. Regardless of the reason, we tend to find some people more socially desirable than others. Social attraction can also be a factor in power dynamics. For example, in situations where there are kids in the “in-group” and those who are not. Here, those who 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 last 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. Perhaps you have a friend who is skilled with computers and is always willing to help you fix your computer when something goes wrong. Maybe you have a friend who is good in math and can tutor you. Of course, these relationships help you accomplish your own goals. In the first case, your goal is to avoid a broken-down computer. In the second case, your goal is to pass 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.

Reasons for Attraction

Now that we've looked at the basics of what attraction is. Let's switch gears and talk about why we are attracted to each other. There are several reasons researchers have found for our attraction to others, including proximity, physicality, perceived gain, similarities and differences, and disclosure.

Physical Proximity

When you ask people how they met their significant other, you often hear that proximity played a role in their meeting. Perhaps they were taking the same class, attend the same church, were employed at the same organization or their families went to the same grocery store. These common-places create opportunities for others to meet and mingle. We are more likely to talk to people whom we see frequently.

Physical Attractiveness

In day-to-day interactions, you are more likely to pay attention to someone you find more attractive than others. Research indicates that males place more emphasis on physical attractiveness than females.⁵ Appearance is very important at the beginning of a relationship.

Perceived Gain

This type of relationship might appear to be like an economic model and can be explained by exchange theory.⁶ We will form relationships with people who can offer us rewards that outweigh the costs. Rewards are the things we want to acquire. They 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 on. 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. A good relationship will have lower costs and more rewards. A poor relationship will have more costs and fewer rewards. Often, when people decide to stay in or leave a relationship, they consider the costs and benefits of the relationship.

Costs and rewards 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 or end it.

Her first alternative is called the **comparison level (CL)**, which represents the minimum standard she will tolerate. If Becky believes it is okay 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 said nothing hurtful toward 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 often use this calculation in relationships. Often, when people consider the possibility of ending a relationship, they consider all alternatives rather than just focusing on costs and benefits.

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 essentially posits that we are drawn to and tend to form relationships with others who are similar to us.⁷ There are three reasons why the similarity thesis works: validation, predictability, and affiliation. First, it's validating to know that someone likes the same things 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 that we tend to like others who are similar to us, and thus we expect them to like us because we are alike. Hence, it creates an affiliation or connection with that other person.

However, some people are attracted to someone opposite to 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 can help satisfy the other'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. Additionally, they don't have to argue over who needs to talk. Another example might be that one person enjoys cooking, while the other prefers to eat. This is a great relationship because both people are getting what they like to do, and it complements each other's talents. Typically, friction arises when there are differences of opinion or control issues. For example, if you have someone who loves to spend money and another who loves to save money, it can be very challenging to decide how to handle financial issues.

Disclosure

Sometimes we form relationships with others after we have disclosed something about ourselves to them. Disclosure increases liking because it creates support and trust between you and the other person. We rarely disclose our most intimate thoughts to strangers. We exhibit 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.⁸ If you provide information, it must be mutual. If you reveal too much or too little, it might be inappropriate and can create tension. Additionally, disclosing information too soon or too quickly in the relationship can lead to negative outcomes.

Key Takeaways

- People experience attraction in different ways. The three primary types of interpersonal attraction are:
 - Physical attraction (based on appearance and aesthetic appeal)
 - Social attraction (based on personality and enjoyment of interaction)
 - Task attraction (based on perceived usefulness in achieving goals)
- Six common reasons people are drawn to form relationships include:
 - Proximity—We are more likely to form relationships with people we encounter frequently.
 - Physical attractiveness—Visual appeal often influences initial interest, particularly in the early stages of a relationship.
 - Perceived gain—Based on social exchange theory, we seek relationships where the rewards outweigh the costs.
 - Similarity—Shared beliefs, values, and experiences validate our worldview and make interactions easier.
 - Differences—Complementary traits can strengthen relationships when each person's strengths support the other's needs.
 - Disclosure—Sharing personal information builds trust and deepens emotional connections when done appropriately and reciprocally.
- The similarity thesis suggests we gravitate toward those who share our beliefs, interests, and background because they validate us and are easier to predict and affiliate with. Complementary relationships work when differences meet each other's needs.
- Disclosure helps form stronger relationships by building trust and emotional connection. However, effective disclosure must be appropriate, timely, and reciprocated to avoid discomfort or boundary violations.
- Social exchange theory posits that people evaluate relationships based on the potential rewards and costs, as well as comparison levels and perceived alternatives. These assessments help determine whether individuals will continue or end their relationships.

Exercises

1. Take a poll of the couples that you know and how they met. Which category does it

- fall into? Is there a difference among your couples and how they met?
2. What are some ways that you could form a relationship with others? Discuss your findings with the class. How is it different/similar to what we talked about in this chapter?
 3. Discuss how and why a certain relationship that you know dissolved. What were the reasons or factors that separated them?

Stages of Relationships

Learning Objectives

1. List and describe the five coming together stages in Knapp and Vangelisti's model of relationship development.
2. Identify and explain the five coming apart stages in relational dissolution.
3. Recognize behaviors that support healthy relationship maintenance.
4. Compare strategic and routine maintenance approaches in long-term relationships.
5. Explain relational load. What are some examples of relational load you may have experienced or observed others experiencing?
6. Apply the RAIN method to promote mindful communication in relational conflict.

Every relationship goes through various stages. Mark Knapp first introduced a series of stages that relationships can progress.⁹ This model was later modified by him and coauthor Anita Vangelisti to create a model of relationships.¹⁰ They believe that we come together and we can come apart in stages. Relationships can get stronger or weaker. Most relationships go through some or all of these stages.

Coming Together

Do you remember when you first met that special someone in your life? How did your relationship start? How did you two become closer? Every relationship has to start somewhere. It begins and grows. In this section, we will learn about the coming together stages, which include: initiating, experimenting, intensifying, integrating, and bonding.



Figure 8.1 Knapp and Vangelisti Model of Relationships

Initiating

At the beginning of every relationship, we must determine whether we are willing to invest the necessary energy and effort in communicating with the other person. If we are interested in pursuing the relationship, we have to let the other person know that we are interested in initiating a conversation.

There are different types of initiation. Sustaining is trying to continue the conversation. Networking involves establishing relationships with others. An offering is a way to present your interest in a particular matter. Approaching is where you directly make contact with the other person. We can establish a relationship in various ways.

Communication at this **initiating** stage is very brief. We might say hello and introduce yourself to the other person. You might smile or wink to let the other person know you're interested in mak-

ing conversation with them. The conversation is very superficial and lacks personal depth. At this stage, we are primarily interested in making contact.

Experimenting

After we have initiated communication with the other person, we go to the next stage, which is **experimenting**. At this stage, you are trying to determine whether you want to continue the relationship. We are trying to learn more about the other person.

At this stage, interactions are very casual. You are looking for common ground or similarities that you share. You might discuss your favorite things, such as colors, sports, or teachers. Just like the name of the stage, we are experimenting and trying to determine whether we should move on to the next stage or not.

Intensifying

After we talk with the other person and decide that this is someone we want to have a relationship with, we enter the **intensifying** stage. We share more intimate and/or personal information about ourselves with that person. Conversations become more serious, and our interactions are more meaningful. At this stage, you might stop saying “I” and say “we.” So, in the past, you might have said to your partner, “I am having a night out with my friends.” It changes to “We are going to be with my friends tonight.” We are becoming more serious about the relationship.

Integrating

The **integrating** stage is where two people truly become a couple. Previously, they might have been dating or enjoying each other’s company, but at this stage, they are letting people know that they are in an exclusive relationship. The expectations in the relationship are higher than they were before. Your knowledge of your partner has increased. The amount of time that you spend with each other is greater.

Bonding

The next stage is the **bonding** stage, where you reveal to the world that your relationship to each other now exists. It might be as simple as a Facebook post. For others, the bonding stage is where they get engaged and have an engagement announcement. For those that are very committed to the relationship, they might decide to have a wedding and get married. In every case, they are making their relationship a public announcement. They want others to know that their relationship is real.

Coming Apart

Some couples can stay in committed and wonderful relationships. However, there are some couples that after bonding, things seem to fall apart. No matter how hard they try to stay together, tension and disagreement persist. These couples undergo a process of coming apart, which involves differentiating, circumscribing, stagnating, avoiding, and terminating.

Differentiating

The **differentiating** stage is where both people are trying to figure out their own identities. Thus, instead of trying to say “we,” the partners will question “How am I different?” At this stage, differences are emphasized, while similarities are overlooked.

As partners differentiate themselves from one another, they engage in more disagreements. The couples will change their pronoun use from “our kitchen” becomes “my kitchen” or “our child” becomes “my child,” depending on what they want to emphasize.

Initially in the relationship, we tend to focus on what we have in common with each other. After we have bonded, we try to balance our independence from each other. If this cannot be resolved, then tensions will emerge, and it usually signals that your relationship is coming apart.

Circumscribing

The **circumscribing** stage is where the partners limit their interactions with each other. Communication will lessen in quality and quantity. Partners try to figure out what they can and can’t talk about with each other so that they will not argue.

Partners may not spend as much time together at this stage. There are also fewer physical displays of affection. Intimacy decreases between the partners. The partners no longer desire to be together and only communicate when necessary.

Stagnating

The next stage is **stagnating**, which means the relationship is not improving or growing. The relationship is motionless or stagnating. Partners do not try to communicate with each other. When communication does occur, it is usually restrained and often awkward. The partners live together physically but not emotionally. They distance themselves from the other person. Their enthusiasm for the relationship is gone. What used to be fun and exciting for the couple is now a chore.

Avoiding

The **avoiding** stage is where both people avoid each other altogether. They would rather stay away from each other than communicate with each other. At this stage, the partners do not want to see each other or speak to each other. Sometimes, partners may think they no longer wish to be in the relationship.

Terminating

The **terminating** stage is where the parties decide to end or terminate the relationship. Ending a relationship is never easy. Several factors can determine whether to end or continue the relationship. Time is a factor. Couples have to decide to end it gradually or quickly. Couples also have to determine what happens after the relationship ends. Additionally, partners must decide how they want to end the relationship. For instance, some people end the relationship via electronic means (e.g., text messages, emails, Facebook posts) or face-to-face.

Final Thoughts on Coming Together

Not every relationship will progress through all ten stages. Several relationships do not progress beyond the experimental stage. Some remain happy at the intensifying or bonding stage. When both people agree that their relationship is satisfying and each person's needs are met, then stabilization occurs. Some relationships also go out of order. For instance, in some arranged marriages, the bonding occurs first, and then the couple goes through various phases. Some people jump from one stage into another. When partners disagree about what constitutes optimal stabilization, disagreements and tensions will inevitably occur.

In today's world, romantic relationships can take on a variety of different meanings and expectations. For instance, terms like “hooking up” or “friends with benefits” are used to describe the status of a relationship. Many people might engage in a variety of relationships, but not necessarily get married. We know relationships vary from couple to couple. Regardless of the relationship type, couples decide to come together or part ways.

Research Spotlight



In 2013, Jesse Fox, Katie M. Warber, and Dana C. Makstaller examined how Facebook influences romantic relationship development through the lens of Knapp's relational stage model.¹¹ The researchers conducted 10 mixed-sex focus groups with 55 college students (ages 18-23) from a Midwestern university to understand how social networking sites affect the traditional stages of relationship formation.

The study revealed that social media has changed how people navigate the early stages of romantic relationships. Facebook was rarely cited as a place to search through profiles to initiate relationships with potential partners; typically, participants did not view social media as a platform for online dating. Instead, pursuers initiated relationships offline and then, whether or not an initial two-way interaction occurred, turned to Facebook to continue communication or gather more information about potential partners. Participants almost universally identified Facebook as their primary tool for interaction during the experimenting stage, with social media interactions largely replacing traditional phone calls.

During the experimenting stage, Facebook serves as a crucial platform for uncertainty reduction as students engage in “creeping” – viewing someone's profile without their knowledge – to gather information about potential romantic interests. Participants were primarily interested in checking relationship status, friends, and pictures to determine compatibility and availability.

Perhaps most significantly, the study identified the emergence of “Facebook official” (FBO) status as a new milestone in the integrating stage of romantic relationships. Participants universally agreed that FBO meant couples were exclusively dating and “off the market.” As Nancy explained, “Our ‘[going] steady’ is becoming Facebook official, and not wearing someone’s class ring around.” The researchers found FBO represents a stage beyond mere exclusivity, with couples typically waiting weeks or months after becoming exclusive before going FBO, as the relationship must be considered stable enough to withstand public scrutiny.

Although this study specifically focused on Facebook, there’s no reason to believe a similar pattern of results wouldn’t occur for other social media platforms.

Relationship Maintenance



Figure 8.2 Relationship Maintenance Behaviors

You may have heard that relationships are hard work. Relationships need maintenance and care. Just as your body needs food and your car needs gasoline to run, your relationships also need attention. When people are in a relationship, what makes a difference in keeping them together is how they feel when they are together. Maintenance can make a relationship more satisfying and successful.

Daniel Canary and Laura Stafford stated that “most people desire long-term, stable, and satisfying relationships.”¹² To keep a satisfying relationship, individuals must utilize relationship maintenance behaviors. They believed that if individuals do not maintain their relationships, the relationships will weaken and/or end. “It is naïve to assume that relationships simply stay together until they fall apart or that they happen to stay together.”¹³

Joe Ayres studied how individuals maintain their interpersonal relationships.¹⁴ Through factor analysis, he identified three types of strategies. First, *avoidance strategies* are used to evade communication that might threaten the relationship. Second, *balance strategies* are used to maintain equality in the relationship so that partners do not feel underbenefited or overbenefited from being in the relationship. Third, *direct strategies* are used to evaluate and remind the partner of relationship objectives. Joe Ayres found that relationship intent had a major influence on the perceptions of the

relationship partners. If partners wanted to stay together, they would make a greater effort to employ maintenance strategies than deterioration strategies.

Laura Stafford and Daniel Canary (1991) found five key relationship maintenance behaviors. First, positivity is a relational maintenance factor that involves communicating with one's partners in a happy and supportive manner. Second, openness occurs when partners focus their communication on the relationship. Third, assurances are words that emphasize the partners' commitment to the duration of the relationship. Fourth, networking is communicating with family and friends. Last, sharing tasks is doing work or household tasks. Later, Canary and his colleagues identified two additional relationship maintenance behaviors: conflict management and offering advice.¹⁵

Canary and Stafford also posited four propositions that serve as a conceptual framework for relationship maintenance research.¹⁶ The first proposition is that relationships will worsen if they are not maintained. The second proposition is that both partners must feel that there are equal benefits and sacrifices in the relationship for it to be sustained. The third proposition states that maintenance behaviors depend on the type of relationship. The fourth proposition is that relationship maintenance behaviors can be used alone or in combination to affect perceptions of the relationship. Overall, these propositions demonstrate the significance and impact that relationship maintenance behaviors can have on relationships.

Relationship maintenance is the stabilization point between relationship initiation and potential relationship destruction.¹⁷ There are two elements to relationship maintenance. First, strategic plans are intentional behaviors and actions used to maintain the relationship. Second, everyday interactions help to sustain the relationship. Most importantly, talk is the most important element in relationship maintenance.¹⁸

Engage in more relational maintenance behaviors in your romantic relationships

Researchers found that couples who perceive higher levels of relational maintenance perceived lower levels of **Relational Load**.

Couples have higher quality relationships when there is prolonged relationship maintenance.
1920

Mindfulness Activity

Learning how to incorporate mindfulness into our interpersonal relationships is one way to foster healthy relationships. Lauren Korshak recommends using the RAIN method when interacting with one's relational partners:



- Recognize: Non-judgmentally acknowledge and name the emotions you feel in the present moment.
- Allow: Acknowledge, accept, and allow your emotions to be as they are without trying to change them. Allowing does not mean you like what is happening, but that you allow it, regardless of your dislike.
- Investigate with kindness: Ask yourself, “What am I experiencing inside my body? What is calling my attention? What does this feeling need from me?”
- Non-identification/nurture with self-compassion: Observe thoughts, feelings, and sensations without attaching to them. If you notice painful feelings, nurture them by placing a hand over your heart or speaking words of kindness, reassurance, and compassion, such as “I see you’re suffering,” or “I’m sorry,” or “I love you, I’m listening.”²¹

For this activity, we want you to use the RAIN method in a conversation with your romantic partner. As an alternative, you can both engage in the RAIN method and discuss a recent conflict you’ve had. The goal is not to establish fault or a win-lose attitude, but rather to learn to empathize with your partner and their perspective.

Key Takeaways

- The five coming together stages in a relationship are:
 - Initiating—Making contact through small talk, greetings, or nonverbal cues.
 - Experimenting—Engaging in light conversation to explore common interests.
 - Intensifying—Sharing more personal thoughts and emotions, using “we” language.
 - Integrating—Presenting yourselves as a couple and merging social lives.
 - Bonding—Making the relationship public through formal commitments or declarations.
- The five coming apart stages are:
 - Differentiating—Emphasizing individual identities and noticing differences.

- Circumscribing—Reducing the scope and depth of communication to avoid conflict.
- Stagnating—Interactions become stale, distant, and emotionally disengaged.
- Avoiding—Deliberately creating physical or emotional distance to escape interaction.
- Terminating—Formally ending the relationship through mutual or unilateral decision.
- Relationship maintenance strategies help sustain healthy partnerships over time. The seven key strategies include:
 - Positivity (being cheerful and supportive)
 - Openness (discussing the relationship and sharing thoughts)
 - Assurances (expressing commitment)
 - Sharing tasks (dividing responsibilities and work)
 - Conflict management (handling disagreements constructively)
 - Social networks (maintaining shared connections)
 - Advice (giving or seeking guidance when needed)
- Strategic maintenance refers to intentional efforts to preserve a relationship, while routine maintenance consists of everyday interactions that reinforce connection. Both are essential for long-term relational satisfaction and success.
- The RAIN method provides a mindfulness-based approach to navigating relational conflict:
 - Recognize—Acknowledge emotions in the moment.
 - Allow—Let the feelings exist without resistance.
 - Investigate with kindness—Explore bodily sensations and emotional needs with curiosity.
 - Non-identification/Nurture—Observe your emotions without becoming them, and offer yourself compassion during distress.

Exercises

1. Find Internet clips that illustrate the coming together/coming apart stages. Show them to your class. Do you agree/disagree?
2. Do a self-analysis of a relationship that you have been involved with or have witnessed. How did the two people come together and come apart? Did they go through all the stages? Why/why not?

3. Write an example of each of the relationship maintenance strategies. Then, rank order in terms of importance to you. Why did you rank them how you did? Find a peer and compare your answers.

Communication in Relationships

Learning Objectives

1. Describe the two levels of communication and how they appear in interpersonal relationships.
2. Identify five common dialectical tensions that arise in relationships.
3. Explain eight communication strategies for managing dialectical tensions.
4. List the five primary functions of self-disclosure in relationships.
5. Differentiate between self-disclosure and the three alternatives to disclosure.

Relationship Dialectics

We know all relationships go through change. The changes in a relationship are usually dependent on communication. When a relationship starts, there are lots of positive and ample communication between the parties. However, there are times when 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 well known 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.²² 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 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, as one cannot be understood without the other. Leslie A. Baxter, the scholar who developed this theory, drew on as many outside sources as possible to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of dialectical tensions within relationships. The development began with a close study of Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian scholar of culture, literature, philosophy, and language. Baxter was interested in his life's work; the theory was often referred to as dialogism. Bakhtin argued that life is a social process of dialogue that is characterized by the concurrent coming together and separating of individual perspectives.

Early in Baxter's career, she noticed that while she was interested in the termination of relationships, her colleagues were interested in the beginnings. Although her colleagues were interested in disclosure, she was interested in non-disclosure. At this point, it still had not occurred to her that these opposing interests in research would lead her to the understanding of dialectical tensions. She continued to research these subjects and read as much as she could on Marxist and Hegelian dialectics, finding these writings both fascinating and frustrating. She processed these writings slowly, and the concepts gradually began to emerge in her work. In 1993, Baxter and Montgomery began writing a book on dialectics titled *"Relating: Dialogues and Dialectics."* This was her first official work done on dialectics and its conversational effects. She continued writing about dialectics and expanded the concepts as she further researched families, romantic relationships, and friendships. Since then, Baxter has continually refined and adapted her studies to find new and more effective ways to apply the theory. After conducting a series of in-depth interviews, both Baxter and Montgomery began to see themes in the tensions experienced in romantic relationships. Their overarching research premise (which is applicable to all relationships—including mother/daughter relationships) is that all personal ties and relationships are always in a state of constant flux and contradiction. Relational dialectics highlight a "dynamic knot of contradictions in personal relationships; an unceasing interplay between contrary or opposing tendencies."²³ The concept of contradiction is crucial to understanding relational dialectics. The contradiction is when there are opposing sides to a situation. These contradictions tend to arise when both parties are considered interdependent. Dialectical tension is natural and inevitable. All relationships are complex because human beings are complex, and this fact is reflected in our communicative processes. Baxter and Montgomery argue that tension arises because we are drawn to the antitheses of opposing sides. These contradictions must be addressed with a "both/and" approach, rather than a "either/or" mindset. However, the "both/and" approach lends to tension and pressure, which almost always guarantees that relationships are not easy.

Dialectical tension is how individuals deal with struggles in their relationship. Couples often face opposing forces or struggles. It is based on Leslie Baxter and Barbara Montgomery's Relational Dialectics Theory in 1996. Below are some different relational dialectics.²⁴

Separation-Integration

This is where partners seek involvement but are not willing to sacrifice their entire identity. For instance, in a marriage, some women struggle with choosing whether to take their partner's last name, keep their maiden name, or combine the two. Often, when partners were single, they might have engaged in a girl's night out or a guy's night out. When in a committed relationship, one partner might feel left out and want to be more involved. Thus, struggles and conflicts occur until the couple can figure out a way to deal with this issue.

Predictability–Novelty

This deals with rituals/routines compared to novelty. For instance, for some mothers, it is tough to accept that their child is an adult. They want their child to grow up but it is difficult to recognize how their child has grown up.

Openness–Closedness

Disclosure is necessary, but there is a need for privacy. For some couples, keeping a diary helps maintain privacy. Yet, there are times when their partner needs to know what can't be expressed directly through words.

Similarity-Difference

This tension revolves around the conflict between self and others. Some couples share very similar thoughts and beliefs. This is beneficial because it facilitates easier communication and smoother conflict resolution. Yet, if partners are too similar, then they cannot grow. Differences can help couples mature and create a sense of stimulation.

Ideal-Real

Couples will perceive some things as good and some things as bad. Their perception of what is real may interfere 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.

Another example might be that a young dating couple thinks they do not have to get married to each other because it is the ideal and accepted view of taking the relationship to the next phase. Thus, the couples move in together and raise a family without being married. They have deviated from what is an ideal normative cultural script.²⁵

Every relationship is fraught with these dialectical tensions. There's no way around them. However, there are different ways of managing dialectical tensions:

- Denial is where we respond to one end.
- Disorientation is where we feel overwhelmed. We fight, freeze, or leave.
- Alternation is where we choose one end on different occasions.
- Recalibration is reframing the situation or perspective.
- Segmentation is where we compartmentalize different areas.
- Balance is where we manage and compromise our needs.
- Integration is blending different perspectives.
- Reaffirmation is having the knowledge & accepting our differences.

Not every couple deals with dialectical tensions in the same way. Some individuals will employ a specific strategy in certain situations, while others will consistently use the same strategy whenever tension arises. You have to decide what is best for you based on the situation.

Self-Disclosure

In [Chapter 7](#), we started our discussion of self-disclosure. We discussed Sidney Jourard's basic definition of self-disclosure, "the act of making yourself manifest, showing yourself so others can perceive you."²⁶ Jourard believed that self-disclosure was necessary to have good mental health. All

in all, Jourard took a very humanistic or health approach to self-disclosure because he deemed it an essential and integral part of our well-being.

Individuals disclose for various reasons. Sandra Petronio has presented five potential reasons for self-disclosure: (a) expression, (b) self-clarification, (c) social value, (d) relationship development, and (e) social control and influence.²⁷ Petronio extended that, “for each type of disclosure, there is a corresponding expectation communicated that influences the choice of response.”²⁸

Four considerations are pertinent to disclosure.²⁹ First, the type of relationship will affect an individual’s need to disclose. The more significant the disclosure is, the greater the need to disclose more information. Second, the disclosure has a risk-to-benefit ratio. Individuals who disclose certain types of information may risk losing certain things (i.e., career or pride) or may benefit from certain things (i.e., trust or security). Third, the appropriateness and relevance of the information to the situation determine what gets disclosed and what does not. Fourth, disclosure depends on reciprocity. Individuals will disclose similar amounts of information to each other.

The amount of disclosure that we will share with others also depends on other factors. It is based on honesty, depth, availability of information, and the environment.

First, when we disclose information to others, we can either truly reveal characteristics about ourselves or lie. A recent study found that most college students lie when initially meeting someone new for the first time. The cause is because we want to impress others. A lot of deception occurs on online chatrooms because sometimes people do not want to reveal who they really are, because of possible repercussions.

Depth is another factor of self-disclosure. When I talk to my parents, I can share hours of information about my day with them. I can discuss a wide range of topics with them. However, I have a friend who is only willing to talk about the weather and what he ate with his parents. As you can see, the depth of information varies significantly. One person only talks about superficial facts, while the other person delves much deeper and will discuss more.

The availability of information also has an impact. For instance, if you have more information on a particular topic, you might provide more detailed comments on the matter. For instance, if you and your friends are trying to decide which presidential candidate to vote support in the next election. You might be more willing to self-disclose what you know about a candidate and your opinions about that candidate based on your information. However, you might be less willing to comment on another candidate if you don’t know their platform or background.

The context or environment has an impact on self-disclosure. For instance, have you ever noticed that people tend to open up about themselves when they are in a confined space, such as an airplane? It is fascinating to observe how people are willing to share personal information about themselves with a total stranger, simply because the other person is doing the same.

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 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 restated what they said in a different way. For instance, Sally says, "How do you like my new dress?", you can say, "Wow! That's a new outfit!" Here, 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

- Interpersonal communication operates on two levels:
 - Content level—conveys literal meaning
 - Relational level—reveals how people feel about each other and their connection
- Five common relational dialectics reflect opposing needs that create tension:
 - Integration vs. Separation—balancing closeness with independence
 - Predictability vs. Novelty—balancing stability with excitement
 - Openness vs. Closedness—balancing sharing with privacy
 - Similarity vs. Difference—balancing common ground with growth
 - Ideal vs. Real—balancing cultural ideals with actual relationship dynamics
- Eight strategies are commonly used to manage dialectical tensions:
 - Denial—ignoring one side of the conflict
 - Disorientation—feeling confused or overwhelmed
 - Alternation—choosing different sides at different times
 - Segmentation—compartmentalizing different aspects of life
 - Balance – negotiating a middle ground
 - Integration – blending both needs creatively
 - Recalibration – reframing the tension positively
 - Reaffirmation – accepting the tension as part of the relationship
- Self-disclosure serves five main purposes in relationships:
 - Expression – releasing emotions
 - Self-clarification – exploring one's thoughts or identity
 - Social value – enhancing status or likability
 - Relationship development – deepening intimacy
 - Social control/influence – shaping how others perceive you

- When people avoid self-disclosure, they may use these alternatives:
 - Deception – providing false information to protect oneself or others
 - Equivocation – giving vague or noncommittal answers
 - Hinting – implying something without saying it directly

Exercises

1. Find a transcript of your favorite television sitcom on the Internet. See if you can identify which types of communication is relational/content and which are symmetrical/complementary.
2. Consider three different issues that you might be dealing in a relationship that you have with another person. What are the relationship dialectic tensions? How are you handling these tensions? Identify what strategy you are using to deal with this tension. Why?
3. Create a list of all the reasons you would disclose and why you would not disclose. Discuss the finding in class. Were there differences or similarities?

Dating Relationships

Learning Objectives

1. Describe the five core components that help define what constitutes a “date.”
2. Explain the concept of dating scripts and how they vary across cultures and identity groups.
3. Identify and compare six types of love styles based on John Lee’s typology.
4. Interpret the role of differentiation of self in romantic relationship satisfaction.
5. Evaluate how cultural conditioning and the media influence the formation of dating expectations.

We often discuss dating as a single construct without really considering how it has developed over time. In the twentieth century alone, we saw dating go from a highly formalized structure involving calling cards and sitting rooms; to drive-in movies in the back seat of a car; to cyberdating with people we’ve never met.³⁰ The 21st Century has already changed how people date through social net-

working sites and geolocation dating apps on smartphones. Dating is not a single thing, and dating has definitely changed with the times.

So, with all this change, how does one even know if someone is on a date in the first place? Thankfully, Paul Mongeau, Janet Jacobsen, and Carolyn Donnerstein have attempted to answer this question for us.³¹ The researchers found that there are five 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 a certain level of self-disclosure on a date. Furthermore, people expect their dating partner to be polite, relaxed, and sociable. Second, dating involves specific date goals, or people on dates have specific objectives (e.g., future romantic relationships, reducing uncertainty, having fun, etc.). 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 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).”³²

Dating Scripts

We will all spend a portion of our lives in some form of romantic 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 2018,³³ 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, etc.) or more formal (21%, e.g., dinner, brunch, etc.).
- 38.1% had been 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.³⁴ He defined a script as a “coherent sequence of events expected by the individual, involving him as either a participant or an observer.”³⁵ According to script theory, people tend to pattern their responses and behaviors during different social interactions to take control of that situation. This requires an individual to be able to imagine their past, present, and future behavior in order to create this script.³⁶ In 1993, Suzanna Rose and Irene Frieze applied Abelson's notions of script theory to dating. They had college students keep records of their activities on a specific 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):³⁷

- Picked up date
- Met parents/roommates
- Left
- Picked up friends
- Confirm plans
- Talked, joked, laughed
- Went to movies, show, party
- Ate
- Drank alcohol
- Initiated sexual contact
- Made out
- Took date home
- Asked for another date
- Kissed goodnight
- 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:³⁸

- Groomed and dressed
- Was nervous
- Picked up date (male)
- Introduced to parents, etc.
- Courtly behavior (open doors—male)
- Left
- Confirmed plans
- Got to know & evaluate date
- Talked, joked, laughed

- Enjoyed date
- Went to movies, show, party
- Ate
- Drank alcohol
- Talked to friends
- Had something go wrong
- Took date home (male)
- Asked for another date (male)
- Told date will call her (male)
- Kissed date goodnight (male)

Take a moment to review these two lists. Do you think they still apply today? How do you think these scripts differ? Once again, these dating scripts were created using only heterosexual college students. Do you think these scripts change if people are dating in their late 20s or 30s? What about people who date in their 70s, 80s, or 90s?

Subsequent research has been conducted 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

First Date³⁹	Gay Men⁴⁰	Lesbians⁴¹	Deaf College Students⁴²
• 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	• 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	• 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	• 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
(M) denotes male behavior			

First Date ³⁹	Gay Men ⁴⁰	Lesbians ⁴¹	Deaf College Students ⁴²
Home (M) • Polite Leave-Taking • Kiss • Future Plans • Part for the Night (M)	contact • Made out • Had Sex • Stayed over • Made plans for another date • Went home	• Went home • Evaluate feelings post-date	
(M) denotes male behavior			

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.

Another important aspect of script theory to consider is how we learn these scripts in the first place. As you read through both the male and female dating scripts, did you consciously think about how you learned to date? Of course not! However, we've been conditioned to date since we were very young. 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 contribute to the dating scripts 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 are presented with these cultural images of dating, we also know that our dating partner (as long as they are from a similar cultural background) will likely have similar dating scripts.

Research Spotlight



In 2023, White et al. examined the relationship between sexual information sources and emerging adults' sex-positive scripts and sexual communication.⁴³ The researchers surveyed 341 college students ages 18–22 to investigate whether learning about sex from parents, peers, and media was associated with students' endorsement of sex-positive sexual scripts and their sexual communication quality.

The study revealed that among all the sexual information sources examined (mothers, fathers, peers, television, movies, and social media), only learning from television was positively related to sex-positive sexual script endorsement. Participants reported learning about sex most frequently from television (85.63%) and movies (84.16%), followed by peers (71.85%) and social media (60.12%). Parents were the least utilized sources, with mothers (55.13%) and fathers (29.03%) being the least utilized. Importantly, the researchers found that sex-positive scripts were associated with more positive sexual

communication between partners, supporting the hypothesis that individuals who endorse sex-positive beliefs engage in higher quality sexual communication.

Gender differences also emerged in how information sources influenced script endorsement. An interaction between gender and learning from television showed that female participants who reported learning about sex from television had more positive sex-positive scripts than male participants. Female participants who learned about sex from social media had lower endorsements of sexual orientation-related scripts compared to males. As the researchers noted, “learning from television was positively related to sex-positive sexual script endorsement, and that sex-positive scripts were associated with more positive sexual communication.”⁴⁴

Table 8.2 Public vs. Private Setting Scripts

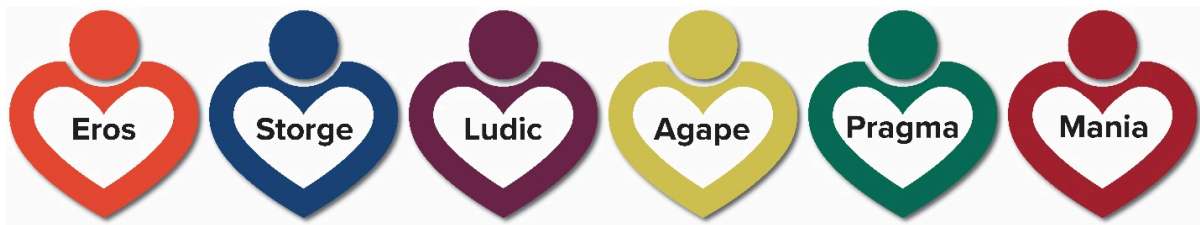
Public Setting Script	Private Setting Script (Her Apartment)
Craig was standing at the bar when he noticed Sarah. She also noticed him. There was eye contact between them. She glanced away. He approached her. “Hi, my name is Craig,” he said. “I’m Sarah. How are you doing?,” she replied. “Can I buy you a drink?,” he asked. Craig asked, “Are you alone?” “No, I came with some friends,” she replied. Craig asked her questions about herself, such as where she was from and what her major was. She responded to his questions. In return, Sarah asked Craig similar questions about himself.	She brought him a drink. “Want to listen to some music?,” asked Sarah. She put on the music. Craig asked, “Are your roommates around?” “This is a great apartment,” said Craig. He sat next to her on the couch. They engaged in casual conversation. There was eye contact between them. He moved closer to her. “You are so beautiful,” said Craig. He put his arm around her. <i>Bedroom setting</i> He undressed her. Craig started to undress himself. Sarah helped him to undress. They discussed whether they should use protection. Craig put on a condom.

As for the results, La France found people predicted that as the sexual scripts progressed, the likelihood that Sarah and Craig were going to have sexual intercourse increased. Overall, La France found that the sequence of both verbal and nonverbal sexual behaviors could predict the likelihood that people believed that Sarah and Craig would have sex. For example, in the public setting script, when Sarah says, “No, I came with some friends,” this caused people to think that sex could be off the table because the statement indicates that the likelihood of the two leaving alone is less likely.⁴⁵

Love Styles

An individual’s love style is considered an attitude that describes how love is perceived.⁴⁶ Attitudes toward love and perceptions of love may change throughout an individual’s life. College stu-

dents may perceive love differently from their parents or guardians because they are at a significantly different stage of life. College students often live among people their age who are more likely to be 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 achieving goals (such as paying off the house, sending kids to college, or paying off debt) 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).⁴⁷



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 had taken 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 attachments.

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 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 mutually independent. An individual may approach love from a pragmatic stance and have found a 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 essential to remember that individuals exhibit each of these love styles, and it is simply a matter of how much of each style a person possesses.

Research Spotlight



In 2022, Frank D. Fincham examined the temporal relationships between trait mindfulness, relationship mindfulness, and sexual quality among emerging adults in dating relationships.⁴⁸ The researcher studied 104 sexually active emerging adults (ages 18–29) in romantic relationships, who completed measures at three time points separated by 6-week intervals.

The study distinguished between two forms of mindfulness: trait mindfulness (the general tendency to be mindful across situations) and relationship mindfulness (mindfulness specific to romantic relationship contexts). Fincham investigated whether these different types of mindfulness were related to sexual quality over time and explored potential mechanisms that might explain these relationships. Fincham also examined sexual quality as comprising both sexual satisfaction and sexual dissatisfaction, recognizing these as distinct rather than opposite constructs.

Results revealed that both forms of mindfulness were indirectly related to sexual quality, but through different pathways. Relationship mindfulness was related to sexual satisfaction 12 weeks later via relationship satisfaction, while trait mindfulness was negatively related to later sexual dissatisfaction via difficulties in emotion regulation. As Fincham noted, “These results suggest that the temporal relationship between mindfulness and sexual quality is indirect and more nuanced than previously thought.”⁴⁹ The study found no direct relation-

ship between either form of mindfulness and sexual outcomes, highlighting the importance of understanding the mediating mechanisms.

Relationships are a Choice

The authors spend significant time talking about forming relationships and the types of love individuals express. It is also important to acknowledge individuals who experience asexuality. Almost 20 years ago, Bogaert published a finding that approximately 1% of the British population was without sexual attraction to anyone.⁵⁰ Determining the number of individuals who are asexual may be difficult because asexuality is a process of self-identification that requires self-disclosure. In other words, there may be far more individuals who are asexual than are reported.

Additionally, asexuality is difficult to define. Is it lack of sexual behavior, lack of sexual desire, lack of romantic feelings? Is it attraction to others, but a lack of sex drive? Researchers Brotto and Yule (2017) identify the most prominent criteria in definitions of asexuality as⁵¹

- lack of sexual attraction and
- self-identification

It is distinct from celibacy and abstinence. Celibacy and abstinence are generally considered to be choices. An oft used symbol of asexuality appears below.

A number of celebrities have self-identified as asexual including Tim Gunn, Edward Gorey, Caitlyn Jenner, Paula Poundstone, and Laverne Cox. Emily Bronte was also said to have been asexual. One of the largest communities for individuals identifying as asexual is [Asexual Visibility and Education Network \(AVEN\)](#).

Key Takeaways

- According to Mongeau and colleagues, five components define a date:
 - Communication expectations—such as politeness and self-disclosure
 - Date goals—e.g., fun, romance, reducing uncertainty
 - Date elements—initiation, activities, timeline
 - Dyadic nature—typically involving a pair
 - Feelings—ranging from affection to romantic attraction
- Dating scripts are culturally learned behaviors that guide how people behave on dates. Scripts differ by gender, sexual orientation, ability, and culture. Common com-

ponents may include grooming, nervousness, shared activities, physical affection, and future plans. These scripts are often unconsciously learned through family, media, and societal expectations.

- John Lee's six love styles reflect different approaches to romantic relationships:
 - Eros—passionate and physical love
 - Storge—friendship-based, gradual love
 - Ludus—playful, game-like love
 - Agape—selfless, giving love
 - Pragma—practical, logical love
 - Mania—possessive, dependent love
- Differentiation of self—the ability to balance emotions, thoughts, and intimacy—predicts romantic satisfaction. Highly differentiated individuals can maintain autonomy and manage emotional reactions in close relationships. Research suggests that mindfulness promotes self-differentiation, which enhances satisfaction in dating relationships.
- Cultural narratives and media influence our expectations for dating from a young age. Movies, TV, and family stories create a shared cultural understanding of how dating “should” look. These narratives contribute to internalized dating scripts that guide behavior, even if unconsciously.

Exercises

1. 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?
2. 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 does not possess the personality characteristics you find attractive. Would you have a romantic relationship with this individual? Why or why not?
3. List and define each love style. List the love styles shown by each of your parents and grandparents. Explain how your love style developed and whether it was learned from a family member or is innate.

How Gender Affects Relationships

Learning Objectives

1. Distinguish between biological sex and gender as social constructs.
2. Identify how gender roles and traits influence interpersonal communication behaviors.
3. Describe typical sex-based communication expectations in U.S. culture.
4. Explain how gender identity influences communication goals and emotional expression.
5. Apply basic communication strategies to improve interpersonal understanding in relationships.

Biological Sex vs. Gender

Sex refers to one's biological status as male or female, as determined by chromosomes and secondary sex characteristics. **Gender**, however, refers to the behaviors and traits society considers masculine and feminine.⁵² Shuhbra Gaur stated "the meaning of gender, according to her, depends on the ways a culture defines femininity and masculinity which lead to expectations about how individual women and men should act and communicate; and how individuals communicate establishes meanings of gender that in turn, influence cultural views."⁵³ That being said, you can have a female who has a masculine gender and, conversely, a male who has a feminine gender. Gender is all about how society has taught one to perceive the surrounding environment. The different traits that an individual displays is how one interprets gender, while other traits depict how an individual was raised and developed. Heidi Reeder noted that "In Western culture the stereotypically masculine traits include aggressiveness, independence and task orientation. Stereotypically feminine traits include being helpful, warm and sincere."⁵⁴ Sex is predetermined, and in most cases, it cannot be changed, but gender is fluid and can vary in many ways.

Gender is formed at a young age, then reinforced for the rest of our lives. That does not mean that gender cannot be changed; it just means that one would go against what gender society deems an individual should be. Gender is influenced by communication from significant figures in a person's life. Gender plays a major role in perceived closeness and disclosure.⁵⁵

When we talk about gender, we are not considering the sex someone is assigned at birth. Rather, we consider what the person feels psychologically. Sandra Bem (1974) was interested in gender roles. She created a Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI). Based on her findings, she could categorize four types of genders: feminine, masculine, **androgynous** (a combination of both feminine and masculine traits), and **undifferentiated** (neither masculine or feminine).⁵⁶ When you combine sex and gender, you can have eight different combinations: masculine males, feminine males, androgynous

males, undifferentiated males, masculine females, feminine females, androgynous females, undifferentiated females.⁵⁷ Most people will perceive themselves as sex-typed or androgynous, rather than undifferentiated.

Bem's work on gender has been eye-opening. She contended that there are three main gender perspectives in Western culture. First, males and females exhibit psychological differences. Second, males are considered more dominant than females. Third, the differences between males and females are natural. If we can understand these fundamental differences, then we can communicate and function more effectively.

Gender Differences in Interpersonal Communication

Each of the gender types communicates differently. Feminine females will perceive interpersonal relationships as opportunities to nurture, articulate their emotions, and express their feelings. Whereas masculine males tend to view interpersonal relationships as a form of competition and a potential means of gaining something. Androgynous males and androgynous females differ little in terms of their perceptions of interpersonal relationships. However, androgynous males and females, as well as feminine females, are likely to sympathize with others more than masculine males.⁵⁸

Sex Differences in Interpersonal Communication

In the United States, we have expectations for how males and females should communicate and behave.⁵⁹ We learn sex differences at a very young age. Boys and girls play, perform, dress, and respond to things very differently. Girls are taught that it is okay to cry in public, but boys are taught to “be a man.” It is acceptable for boys to pretend to play guns and for girls to pretend to play being mothers. Males are conditioned to have **instrumental** roles, which are task-oriented responsibilities. Females are conditioned to have **expressive** roles, which are focused on helping and nurturing others or relationship-oriented.

Improving Communication Skills

Many popular guides to enhancing communication skills place particular emphasis on exploring your own needs, desires, and motives in the relationship. Some goals you have in a relationship may be subconscious. By becoming more aware of these goals, and what you want to achieve in a relationship, you can identify areas of the relationship that you would like to improve and generate ideas for making these changes.

Because people in relationships are interconnected and interdependent, it requires individuals who are willing to be open about their needs and relationship goals, as well as those who are willing to work on improving communication and, consequently, the relationship as a whole.

As previously discussed, clear communication is essential for both giving and receiving information. Words have multiple denotations and connotations, and word choice is critical when you communicate about areas of your relationship that are not satisfying. Asking for and providing clar-

ification, sending explicit messages, obtaining feedback to ensure understanding, and listening carefully to the feedback are all important components of effective communication. Finally, when you communicate, remember that everyone wants to be heard, to feel valued, to know that they matter, and to be assured that their ideas are important.

Key Takeaways

- Sex is biological, while gender is psychological and socially constructed. A person's sex refers to physical traits, such as chromosomes and reproductive organs, while gender reflects learned behaviors, roles, and expectations associated with masculinity and femininity.
- Gender roles influence how individuals interact with others. Masculine traits, such as assertiveness and independence, often contrast with feminine traits like warmth and empathy. People who are androgynous show greater flexibility and emotional awareness in their communication.
- Cultural norms influence how males and females are expected to communicate. In the United States, boys are often raised to be assertive and action-focused, while girls are encouraged to be expressive and relationship-oriented. These early lessons influence adult communication patterns.
- Gender identity impacts how individuals express emotions and form relationships. Feminine and androgynous individuals are more likely to express care and sympathy, while masculine individuals may focus on goals, control, or emotional restraint in interactions.
- To improve communication in relationships, reflect on your needs and be open about them. Use clear and respectful language, ask for clarification when needed, and listen attentively to others. Strong communication is built on making people feel heard, understood, and valued.

Exercises

1. As a class, ask everyone to list all the characteristics they associate with males and females. Then, ask one person to write each word on a Post-it note. Then, on the board in front of the class, divide it into two sections: males and females. Each student will have the opportunity to place the words in the male or female section. Discuss to see if you all agree.
2. Ask all the males to step out of the classroom and ask all the females to stay in the

classroom. Each group will come up with ten questions that they always wanted to know about the opposite sex. For instance, why do girls open their mouths when putting on mascara? Or why do boys recall sports information so well? Come back into the classroom together and designate a spokesperson for each side. Males will ask their questions of females, and females will ask their questions of males. Each side will have the opportunity to respond as a group. Why did you answer the way you did? Are there truly differences between males and females?

3. On a sheet of paper, divide it into two parts and label one side 'male' and the other 'female.' Complete the sentence: Males are_____ and Females are _____. Write your words on your paper. Try to list ten answers for females and males. As a class, compare your lists.

Key Terms

agape

androgynous

attraction

avoiding

bonding

circumscribing

CL

CL of alternatives

compatible

complementary

contact frequency

content level

demonstrative

differentiating

duration

empathy

eros

experimenting

gender

goals

hedge

initiating

instrumental

Integrating

intensifying

interaction variability

interdependent

intimacy

love

love style

ludus

mania

physical attraction

platonic

pragma	social attraction
relationship	stagnating
relationship dialectic	storge
relationship level	support
relationship maintenance	symmetrical relationship
romantic relationships	task attraction
self-disclosure	terminating
sex	undifferentiated
sharing	

Chapter Wrap-Up

In this chapter, we've explored the range of issues related to building and maintaining relationships. We began by discussing 'relationships,' which included a discussion of their characteristics and the importance of significant relationships. We then discussed the formation and dissolution of relationships. Then, we explored the importance of communication in relationships. Lastly, we examined dating relationships and concluded by discussing gender and relationships. Hopefully, you can see that building and maintaining relationships takes a lot of work.

Chapter Exercises

Real-World Case Study

Bill and Hillary have been dating each other since they were first-year students in college. They know they might like to get married and start a family. Before graduation, Bill learns he has received his dream offer in another city. Hillary wants to stay in the same college town, where she grew up and her family lives. She does not want to move. Additionally, she received a job offer in the same town that would be beneficial for her. In the long term, Hillary thinks Bill should give up his dream job and sacrifice it for love and their future together. Bills thinks she is being selfish. He thinks he could make enough money so that they could travel back to see her family often. He thinks she is being selfish for not considering his feelings and dreams. Bill knows that he will never get another opportunity like this again. He also knows he will not find another woman like Hillary. Hillary loves Bill, but she also loves her family. She doesn't want a long-distance relationship with either of them. Hilary thinks that if they had their own family, it would be ideal to have other family members close by.

- What would you do if you were Hillary/Bill?
- How do you determine the best decision?
- What are the possible solutions, and what would be the best solution?
- If they decide to get married, how do they determine when would be best and when to have kids?
- What topics do Bill and Hillary need to agree on first?

End-of-Chapter Assessment

1. Picking a seat in class near the person you'd like to get to know is an example of
 - a. offering
 - b. approaching
 - c. networking
 - d. self-disclosing
 - e. sustaining
2. The fact that we are likely to pick a mate with whom we frequently cross paths is due to which reason for forming relationships?
 - a. appearance
 - b. proximity
 - c. similarity
 - d. reciprocity
 - e. differences
3. After 20 years of marriage, Chad and Autumn are bored in their relationship. They know what the other person will do and say every day. This dialectical tension is:
 - a. integration-separation
 - b. expression -privacy
 - c. stability-change
 - d. altruistic-selfishness
 - e. complementary-symmetrical
4. Aubrey loves to eat Asian food, but Gavin would rather just eat American food. The way the deal with their tensions is to say that they both love to eat food. The strategy they are most likely using is:
 - a. denial
 - b. recalibration
 - c. integration
 - d. balance
 - e. reaffirmation
5. Anna, who is counselor at a women's crisis center, says the reason she most often hears from battered wives for returning to their husbands is, "I don't have any other place to go." Which explanation of why people perform relationships best predicts this relationship?
 - a. disclosure thesis that suggests we are attracted to those who use disclosure appropriately

- b. the reward thesis that suggests we are attracted to people we believe are can give us rewards
- c. the similarity thesis that suggests we like people whom we perceive are like us
- d. exchange theory that suggests we form relationships through assessment of potential rewards and costs
- e. the reciprocity thesis that suggests being liked by others is a strong source of attraction

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Chapter 9: Conflict in Relationships



“Mother Lecturing her Daughter” by [Sonam Prajapati](#)
from [Pexels](#)

Conflict is a normal and natural part of life. Conflict is inevitable. However, learning how to manage conflict in our interpersonal relationships is very important for long-term success in those relationships. This chapter is going to look at how conflict functions and provide several strategies for managing interpersonal conflict.

Understanding Conflict

Learning Objectives

1. Differentiate between the terms conflict, disagreement, and argument.
2. Explain the two major perspectives on the nature of conflict.
3. Define and describe the components of interpersonal conflict.

For our purposes, it is necessary to distinguish between a conflict and a disagreement.¹ A **disagreement** is a difference of opinion. It often occurs during an **argument**, or a verbal exchange

between two or more people who have differing opinions on a given subject or subjects. It's essential to recognize that arguments are not necessarily conflicts, but they can quickly escalate into conflicts if they become verbally aggressive. One factor that ultimately can help determine if an argument will escalate into a conflict is an individual's tolerance for disagreement. James McCroskey, along with his colleagues, initially defined **tolerance for disagreement** as the ability of an individual to openly discuss differing opinions without feeling personally attacked or confronted.^{2 3} People who have a high tolerance for disagreement can easily discuss opinions with pretty much anyone and realize that arguing is perfectly normal and, for some, even entertaining. People with a low tolerance for disagreement often feel personally attacked whenever someone is perceived as devaluing their opinion. From an interpersonal perspective, understanding someone's tolerance for disagreement can help in deciding whether arguments will be perceived as attacks that could lead to verbally aggressive conflicts. However, not all conflict is necessarily verbally aggressive nor destructive.

The term "conflict" is actually quite difficult to define. We could have an entire chapter where we just examined various definitions of the term. Simplistically, **conflict** is an interactive process occurring when conscious beings (individuals or groups) have opposing or incompatible actions, beliefs, goals, ideas, motives, needs, objectives, obligations, resources, and/or values. First, conflict is an interactive and inherently communicative phenomenon. Second, two or more people or even groups of people who can think must be involved. Lastly, there is a wide range of areas where people can hold opposing or incompatible opinions. For this generic definition, we provided a laundry list of different types of incompatibility that can exist between two or more individuals or groups. Is this list completely exhaustive? No. However, we provided this list as a way to consider the more common types of issues that arise when people engage in conflict. From this perspective, everything, from a minor disagreement to a knock-down, drag-out fight, would be classified as a conflict.

The remainder of this section will explore the nature of conflict and its significance in communication. To do this, we'll discuss two different perspectives on conflict (disruption vs. normalcy). Then we'll explore interpersonal conflict more closely. Lastly, we'll discuss the positive and negative functions of conflict.

Two Perspectives on Conflict

As with most areas of interpersonal communication, no single perspective in the field related to interpersonal conflict. There are two very different perspectives that one can take. Herbert W. Simmons was one of the first to recognize that there were two distinct perspectives on conflict.⁴ On the one hand, you had scholars who see conflict as a disruption in a normal working system, which should be avoided. On the other hand, some scholars view conflict as a normal part of human relationships. Let's look at each of these in this section.

Disruptions in the Normal Workings of a System

The first major perspective of conflict was proposed by James C. McCroskey and Lawrence R. Wheless.⁵ McCroskey and Wheless described conflict as a negative phenomenon in interpersonal relationships:

Conflict between people can be viewed as the opposite or antithesis of affinity. In this sense, interpersonal conflict is the breaking down of attraction and the development of repulsion, the dissolution of perceived homophily (similarity) and the increased perception of incompatible differences, the loss of perceptions of credibility and the development of disrespect.⁶

From this perspective, conflict is inherently destructive. McCroskey and Virginia P. Richmond went further, arguing that conflict is characterized by antagonism, distrust, hostility, and suspicion.⁷

This more negative view of conflict distinguishes itself from the separate term 'disagreement,' which is simply a difference of opinion between two or more people or groups of people. Richmond and McCroskey note that there are two types of disagreements: substantive and procedural.⁸ A **substantive disagreement** is a disagreement that people have about a specific topic or issue. Basically, if you and your best friend want to go eat at two different restaurants for dinner, then you're engaging in a substantive disagreement. On the other hand, **procedural disagreements** are "concerned with procedure, how a decision should be reached or how a policy should be implemented."⁹ So, if your disagreement about restaurant choice switches to a disagreement on how to make a choice (flipping a coin vs. rock-paper-scissors), then you've switched into a procedural disagreement.

A conflict, then, is a disagreement plus negative affect, or when you disagree with someone else and you don't like the other person. It's the combination of a disagreement and dislike that causes a mere disagreement to turn into a conflict. Ultimately, conflict is a product of how one communicates one's dislike of another person during the disagreement. In some relationships, people end up saying very nasty things to one another during disagreements because their affinity for the other person has diminished. When conflict is allowed to continue and escalate, it "can be likened to an ugly, putrid, decaying, pus-filled sore."¹⁰

From this perspective, conflicts are ultimately only manageable; whereas, disagreements can be solved. Although a disagreement is the cornerstone of all conflicts, most disagreements don't turn into conflicts because there is an affinity between the two people engaged in the disagreement.

Normal Part of Human Communication

The second perspective on the concept of conflict differs significantly from the first. As described by Dudley D. Cahn and Ruth Anna Abigail, conflict is a normal, inevitable part of life.¹¹ Cahn and Abigail argue that conflict is one of the foundational building blocks of interpersonal relationships. One can even ask if it's possible to grow in a relationship without conflict. Managing and overcoming conflict makes a relationship stronger and healthier. Ideally, when interpersonal couples engage in conflict management (or conflict resolution), they will reach a solution that is mutually beneficial for both parties. In this manner, conflict can help people seek better, healthier outcomes within their interactions.

Ultimately, conflict is neither good nor bad, but it's a tool that can be used for constructive or destructive purposes. Conflict can be very beneficial and healthy for a relationship. Let's look at how conflict is beneficial for individuals and relationships:

- Conflict helps people find common ground.
- Conflict helps people learn how to manage conflict more effectively for the future.
- Conflict provides the opportunity to learn about the other person(s).
- Conflict can lead to creative solutions to problems.
- Confronting conflict allows people to engage in an open and honest discussion, which can build relationship trust.
- Conflict encourages people to grow both as humans and in their communication skills.
- Conflict can help people become more assertive and less aggressive.
- Conflict can strengthen individuals' ability to manage their emotions.
- Conflict lets individuals set limits in relationships.
- Conflict lets us practice our communication skills.

When one approaches conflict from this vantage point, it can be seen as a valuable resource in interpersonal relationships. However, both parties must employ prosocial conflict management strategies for this approach to work effectively (more on that later in this chapter).

Now that we've examined the basic idea of conflict, let's shift our focus to a more interpersonal perspective.

Interpersonal Conflict

According to Cahn and Abigail, interpersonal conflict requires four factors to be present:

1. the conflict parties are interdependent,
2. they have the perception that they seek incompatible goals or outcomes or they favor incompatible means to the same ends,
3. the perceived incompatibility has the potential to adversely affect the relationship leaving emotional residues if not addressed, and
4. there is a sense of urgency about the need to resolve the difference.¹²

Let's examine each of these aspects of interpersonal conflict individually.

People are Interdependent

According to Cahn and Abigail, “**interdependence** occurs when those involved in a relationship characterize it as continuous and important, making it worth the effort to maintain.”¹³ From this perspective, interpersonal conflict occurs when we are in some relationship with another person. For example, it could be a relationship with a parent/guardian, a child, a coworker, a boss, a spouse, etc. In each of these interpersonal relationships, we generally see ourselves as having long-term relationships with these people that we want to succeed. Notice, though, that if you're arguing with a random person on a subway, that will not fall into this definition because of the interdependence factor. We may have disagreements and arguments with all kinds of strangers, but those don't rise to the level of interpersonal conflicts.

People Perceive Differing Goals/Outcomes of Means to the

Same Ends

An incompatible goal occurs when two people want different things. For example, imagine you and your best friend are thinking about going to the movies. They want to see a big-budget superhero film, and you're more in the mood for an independent artsy film. In this case, you have pretty incompatible goals (movie choices). You can also achieve the same end through incompatible means. Incompatible means, in this case, "occur when we want to achieve the same goal but differ in how we should do so."¹⁴ For example, you and your best friend agree on going to the same movie, but not about at which theatre you should see the film.

Conflict Can Negatively Affect the Relationship if Not Addressed

Next, interpersonal conflicts can lead to very negative outcomes if the conflicts are not managed effectively. Here are some examples of conflicts that are not managed effectively:

- One partner dominates the conflict, and the other partner caves-in.
- One partner yells or belittles the other partner.
- One partner uses half-truths or lies to get her/his/their way during the conflict.
- Both partners only want to get their way at all costs.
- One partner refuses to engage in conflict.
- One partner becomes physically violent with the other person, because they don't know how to control their anger.
- Etc.

Again, this is a sample laundry list of some ways where conflict can be mismanaged. When conflict is mismanaged, one or both partners may develop a less favorable view of the other, leading to a decrease in liking, reduced caring for the relational partner, increased desire to exit the relationship, increased relational apathy, and increased revenge-seeking behavior. All of these negative outcomes could ultimately lead to conflicts becoming increasingly aggressive (both active and passive) or to outright conflict avoidance. We'll look at both of these later in the chapter.

Some Sense of Urgency to Resolve Conflict

Last, there must be a sense of urgency to resolve the conflict within the relationship. The conflict reaches a point where it must receive attention, and a decision must be made or an outcome decided upon, or else it will become more problematic and negative if left unaddressed.

Now, some people let conflicts simmer and escalate over many years, which can eventually boil over. However, these types of conflicts, when they arise, often have an underlying issue that is causing the sudden explosion. For example, imagine your spouse has a particularly quirky habit. For the most part, you ignore this habit and may even make a joke about the habit. Finally, one day you just explode and demand the habit must change. Now, you may let this conflict build for so long that it finally explodes. It's kind of like a geyser. According to Yellowstone National Park, here's how a geyser works:

The looping chambers trap steam from the hot water. Escaped bubbles from trapped steam heat the water column to the boiling point. When the pressure from the trapped steam builds enough, it blasts, releasing the pressure. As the entire water column boils out of the ground, more than half the volume is this steam. The eruption stops when the water cools below the boiling point.¹⁵

In the same way, sometimes people let irritations or underlying conflict percolate inside of them until they reach a boiling point, which leads to the eventual release of pressure as a sudden, out-of-nowhere conflict. Here, even though the conflict has been building for some time, the eventual desire to make this conflict known to the other person does cause an immediate sense of urgency to resolve the conflict.

Research Spotlight



Researchers Chen Zhang, Manyi Wang, Wensong Zhang, Hongyue Zhang, Hanning Li, Fengbo Liang, and Ganjing Hou (2025)¹⁶ conducted a study titled *Sense of Achievement from a Side Hustle and Interpersonal Conflict in the Primary Workplace*.

The researchers explored how working an additional job in the “gig economy” as a **gig economy side hustle** affects interpersonal conflict in the workplace.

The researchers rationalized that workers performing a side hustle got instant positive feedback from their job because they performed jobs such as food delivery or driving. This positive feedback in the side hustle might lead to a sense of entitlement. The first hypothesis was.

H1: Sense of achievement from a side hustle will be positively associated with psychological entitlement.

The researchers found that current literature indicates that psychological entitlement leads to negative emotions in the workplace. (Vatankhah & Raoofi, 2018)¹⁷. As a result they proposed the second hypothesis.

H2: The psychological entitlement of employees who also work in a side hustle will be positively associated with their pursuit of dominance status in their main job.

The researchers found that psychological entitlement was associated with a sense of achievement and psychological entitlement was a factor in individuals striving to domi-

nate in their primary work place. Overall, psychological entitlement has a negative impact in the workplace.

Two other hypotheses were proposed to look at other influences on conflict in the workplace.

H3: The psychological entitlement of employees who work in a side hustle will mediate the relationship between the sense of achievement they receive from the side hustle and their dominance status striving in their main job.

Hypothesis 3 was confirmed. Individuals who had a greater sense of entitlement engaged in more dominance seeking in their main job.

H4: The competence **attribution** of employees who work in a side hustle will moderate the relationship between their sense of achievement from the side hustle and psychological entitlement.

Hypothesis 4 was confirmed. When individuals attributed their success in their side hustle to their own abilities, they had a greater sense of entitlement.

Status in organizations is limited. Those with a higher status level get to control resources which are also limited. When individuals strive to dominate others by seeking a higher status level it can be perceived as threatening.

H5: The dominance status striving of employees who work in a side hustle will be positively related to interpersonal conflict with coworkers and leaders at their main job.

Hypothesis 5 was supported in the study. Individuals engaging in dominance striving had more conflict in the work place.

Be mindful:

- The authors recommend that individuals who are not working a side-hustle attribute their competence to work in the main job accurately even if positive feedback is not as frequent and readily available as gig workers.
- The authors recommend “checking” status seeking behavior in the workplace when employees are interested in good relationships. Be sure to form good relationships with coworkers and adjust behavior when seeking greater status. In other words, be considerate!

Key Takeaways

- The terms *disagreement*, *argument*, and *conflict* are distinct. A disagreement is a difference of opinion. An argument is a verbal exchange over those opinions. A conflict occurs when disagreement is paired with negative feelings or aggression and can escalate depending on one's tolerance for disagreement.
- There are two key perspectives on conflict. One view sees conflict as a harmful breakdown in relationships that should be avoided at all costs. The other view sees conflict as natural and inevitable, offering opportunities for growth, mutual understanding, and improved communication—when managed constructively.
- According to Cahn and Abigail, interpersonal conflict has four defining features:
 - Interdependence—the people involved are in a meaningful relationship
 - Perceived incompatibility—of goals or means to the same end
 - Potential for harm—unmanaged conflict can negatively affect the relationship
 - Urgency—a need to resolve the issue before it escalates further
- Sense of achievement and lead to psychological entitlement in the workplace leading individuals to seek status contributing to conflict. Reflect carefully on how achievement is attained and building good relationships.

Exercises

1. On a sheet of paper, write out what you believe are the pros and cons of both major perspectives about conflict. Which one do you think describes your understanding of conflict? Do you think they are both applicable to interpersonal conflict?
2. Think of a time when you've engaged in conflict with a relational partner of some kind (parent/guardian, child, sibling, spouse, friend, romantic partner, etc.). Using Cahn and Abigail's four parts of interpersonal conflict, dissect the conflict and explain why it would qualify as an interpersonal conflict.
3. We recognize that individuals have varying levels of tolerance for disagreement in life. How do you think an individual's tolerance for disagreement impacts their ability to interact with others interpersonally?
4. Consider status seeking in the workplace. How will you engage in achievement in the workplace while maintaining good relationships?

Emotions and Feelings

Learning Objectives

1. Explain the interrelationships among emotions and feelings.
2. Describe emotional awareness and its importance to interpersonal communication.
3. Differentiate between “I” and “You” statements.
4. Explain the concept of emotional intelligence.

To begin our examination of the concept of emotions and feelings, and how they relate to harmony and discord in a relationship, it’s essential to distinguish between emotions and feelings. **Emotions** are our reactions to stimuli in the outside environment. Emotions, therefore, can be objectively measured by blood flow, brain activity, and nonverbal reactions to things. **Feelings**, on the other hand, are the 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 we do differentiate between them. Table 9.1 breaks down the differences between the two concepts.

It’s important to understand that we are all allowed to be emotional beings. Being emotional is an inherent part of being a human. For this reason, it’s important to avoid phrases like “don’t feel that way” or “they have no right to feel that way.” Again, our emotions are our emotions, and, when we negate someone else’s emotions, we negate that person as an individual and take away their right to emotional responses. 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 in which you experience an emotion, but you are the one who is still experiencing that emotion and allowing yourself to experience it. If you don’t like “feeling” a specific way, then change it. We all can 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, it is essential to openly communicate about how they are feeling in order to process and work through their emotions. The worst thing a person can do is attempt to deny that the emotion exists.

Think of this as a balloon. With each breath of air you blow into the balloon, you are bottling up more and more emotions. Eventually, that balloon will reach a point where it can no longer hold any more air before it bursts. 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 outpourings 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.¹⁸

Table 9.1 The Differences of Emotions and Feelings

Feelings	Emotions
Feelings tell us “how to live.”	Emotions tell us what we “like” and “dislike.”
Feelings state: “There is a right and wrong way to be.”	Emotions state: “There are good and bad actions.”
Feelings state: “your emotions matter.”	Emotions state: “The external world matters.”
Feelings establish our long-term attitude toward reality.	Emotions establish our initial attitude toward reality.
Feelings alert us to anticipated dangers and prepares us for action.	Emotions alert us to immediate dangers and prepare us for action.
Feelings ensure long-term survival of self (body and mind).	Emotions ensure immediate survival of self (body and mind).
Feelings are Low-key but Sustainable.	Emotions are Intense but Temporary.
Happiness: is a feeling.	Joy: is an emotion.
Worry: is a feeling.	Fear: is an emotion.
Contentment: is a feeling.	Enthusiasm: is an emotion.
Bitterness: is a feeling.	Anger: is an emotion.
Love: is a feeling.	Lust: is an emotion.
Depression: is a feeling.	Sadness: is an emotion.

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Emotional Awareness

Sadly, many people are completely 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.”¹⁹ Furthermore, many people 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. Learning how to express one’s emotions is crucial for maintaining effective interpersonal relationships.²⁰ 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, but you really cannot feel alienated. Your sadness and depression may lead you to perceive yourself as alienated, but alienation is a perception of oneself self and not an actual emotional state. There are several evaluative terms that people ascribe to 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.

Table 9.2 Evaluative Words Confused for Emotions			
Abandoned	Pressured	Co-opted	Humiliated
Neglected	Bullied	Devalued	Unheard
Belittled	Ridiculed	Thwarted	Maligned
Put away	Scorned	Interrupted	Wounded
Coerced	Distrusted	Unsupported	Affronted
Cornered	Unappreciated	Mocked	Patronized
Threatened	Let down	Misunderstood	Boxed-in
Injured	Used	Attacked	Rejected
Unseen	Abused	Provoked	Diminished
Manipulated	Overworked	Cheated	Tortured
Mistreated	Betrayed	Ruined	Intimidated
Alienated	Putdown	Taken for granted	Unwanted

Instead, people need to avoid using evaluative words and learn how to communicate effectively by expressing a wide range of emotions. Tables 9.3 and 9.4 provide a list of both positive and negative feelings that people can express. Go through the list considering the power of each emotion. Do you associate light, medium, or strong emotions with the words provided on these lists? Why? There is no right or wrong way to answer this question. Still, it is essential to recognize that individuals may vary in their interpretations of the emotional intensity of different words. If you don’t know what a word means, you should look it up and add another word to your list of feelings that you can express to others.

Table 9.3 Positive Emotions

Absorbed	Glorious	Complacent	Thankful
Satisfied	Helpful	Zippy	Overwhelmed
Joyous	Energetic	Aglow	Quiet
Fascinated	Blissful	Serene	Inspired
Confident	Touched	Lively	Enthusiastic
Eager	Pleasant	Fulfilled	Calm
Amazed	Refreshed	Curious	Upbeat
Stimulated	Intrigued	Effervescent	Delighted
Merry	Exhilarated	Appreciative	Sanguine
Gleeful	Comfortable	Tender	Jovial
Happy	Wonderful	Optimistic	Exultant
Encouraged	Affectionate	Good-humored	Concerned
Astonished	Sensitive	Inquisitive	Gratified
Tickled Pink	Keyed-up	Enlivened	Alive
Perky	Friendly	Buoyant	Splendid
Rapturous	Cool	Trusting	Mellow
Interested	Ecstatic	Proud	Glad
Excited	Animated	Relieved	Radiant
Cheerful	Surprised	Involved	Enchanted
Warm	Moved	Expectant	Aroused
Adventurous	Glowing	Composed	Thrilled
Secure	Hopeful	Dazzled	Peaceful
Jubilant	Engrossed	Alert	Intense
Free	Breathless	Spellbound	Euphoric
Content	Tranquil	Loving	Carefree
Ebullient	Pleased	Genial	Vibrant
Amused	Relaxed	Grateful	
Sunny	Invigorated	Elated	
Mirthful	Expansive	Ardent	

Table 9.4 Negative Emotions

Afraid	Indifferent	Alarmed	Irked
Downhearted	Spiteful	Embarrassed	Surprised
Melancholy	Blue	Morose	Chagrined
Unhappy	Guilty	Upset	Helpless
Detached	Resentful	Disappointed	Scared
Disgusted	Shaky	Displeased	Skeptical
Keyed-up	Appalled	Lethargic	Ashamed
Terrified	Forlorn	Troubled	Furious
Cool	Passive	Cross	Petulant
Horrible	Woeful	Humdrum	Sensitive
Impatient	Agitated	Irate	Anguished
Spiritless	Edgy	Sullen	Exasperated
Blah	Mopey	Brokenhearted	Nervous
Grouchy	Unsteady	Heavy	Vexed
Repelled	Disenchanted	Sad	Disgruntled
Sensitive	Dismayed	Shocked	Disturbed
Apathetic	Leery	Aroused	Lonely
Fidgety	Tired	Frustrated	Unconcerned
Panicky	Cranky	Pessimistic	Depressed
Withdrawn	Hot	Wretched	Ill-Tempered
Aggravated	Intense	Angry	Irritated
Dull	Startled	Embittered	Suspicious
Miserable	Bored	Mournful	Cold
Unnerved	Harried	Uptight	Hesitant
Disaffected	Restless	Discouraged	Seething
Disheartened	Shameful	Disquieted	Sleepy
Lazy	Apprehensive	Listless	Beat
Ticked off	Frightened	Uncomfortable	Galled
Crabby	Perplexed	Dejected	Puzzled
Hostile	Worried	Hurt	Shaky

Annoyed	Tearful	Numb	Horried
Exhausted	Concerned	Weepy	Sorry
Nettled	Hopeless	Downcast	Bitter
Weary	Sorrowful	Mean	Grim
Distressed	Bewildered	Unglued	Reluctant
Mad	Gloomy	Despondent	Anxious
Uneasy	Rancorous	Jittery	Fearful
Despairing	Antagonistic	Tepid	Overwhelmed
Jealous	Fatigued	Confused	Wistful

The Problem of You Statements

According to Marshall Rosenberg, 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.²¹ When we make moralistic judgments about others, we deny responsibility for our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Remember, with 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 relational partner does not meet our individual needs. Behind every negative emotion is a need that is not being fulfilled, and when we start blaming others, those needs will continue to go unfulfilled in the process. Often, this lack of need fulfillment results in our demanding that someone fulfill our need or face blame or punishment. For example, “If you go hang out with your friends tonight, I’m going to hurt myself and it will your fault.” In this simple sentence, we see someone who disapproves of another’s behaviors and threatens to blame their relational partner for the individual’s behavior. In highly volatile relationships, this constant blame cycle can become extremely detrimental, as no one’s needs are being met.

However, simply observing behavior and stating how you feel only gets you part of the way there, because you’re still not articulating 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. Relational needs are not rewards like tangible items or money. Instead, Marshall Rosenberg categorizes basic needs that we all have falling into the categories: autonomy, celebration, play, spiritual communion, physical nurturance, integrity, and interdependence (Table 9.5). As you can imagine, any time these needs are not being met, you will reach out to get them fulfilled. As such, when we communicate about our feelings, they are tied to an unmet or fulfilled need. 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

Area	Need
Autonomy	to choose one's dreams, goals, values
	to choose one's plan for fulfilling one's dreams, goals, values
Celebration	to celebrate the creation of life and dreams fulfilled
	to celebrate losses: loved ones, dreams, etc. (mourning)
Play	fun
	laughter
Spiritual Communion	beauty
	harmony
	inspiration
	order
	peace
Physical Nurturance	air
	food
	movement, exercise
	protection from life-threatening forms of life: viruses, bacteria, insects, predatory animals
	rest
	sexual expression
	shelter
	touch
	water
Integrity	authenticity
	creativity
	meaning
	self-worth
Interdependence	acceptance
	appreciation
	closeness

Area	Need
	community
	consideration
	contribution to the enrichment of life (to exercise one's power by giving that which contributes to life)
	emotional safety
	empathy
	honesty (the empowering honest that enables us to learn from our limitations)
	love
	reassurance
	respect
	support
	trust
	understanding
	warmth
Source: <i>Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life</i> 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	

Emotional Intelligence

In [Chapter 3](#), we first discussed the concept of emotional intelligence. However, it's essential to revisit this concept before proceeding. In Chapter 3, we defined **emotional intelligence(EQ)** as an individual's appraisal and expression of their emotions and the emotions of others in a manner that enhances thought, living, and communicative interactions. Furthermore, we learned that EQ is built by four distinct emotional processes: perceiving, understanding, managing, and using emotions.²² Although we are talking about the importance of EQ, take a minute and complete The Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire, which is a simple 20-item questionnaire designed to help you evaluate your own EQ.

The Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire

Instructions: Read the following statements and select the answer that corresponds with your perception. Do not be concerned if some of the items appear similar. Please use the scale below to rate the degree to which each statement applies to you.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

- _____1. I am aware of my emotions as I experience them.
- _____2. I easily recognize my emotions.
- _____3. I can tell how others are feeling simply by watching their body movements.
- _____4. I can tell how others are feeling by listening to their voices.
- _____5. When I look at people's faces, I generally know how they are feeling.
- _____6. When my emotions change, I know why.
- _____7. I understand that my emotional state is rarely comprised of one single emotion.
- _____8. When I am experiencing an emotion, I have no problem easily labeling that emotion.
- _____9. It's completely possible to experience two opposite emotions at the same time (e.g., love & hate; awe & fear; joy & sadness, etc.).
- _____10. I can generally tell when my emotional state is shifting from one emotion to another.
- _____11. I don't let my emotions get the best of me.
- _____12. I have control over my own emotions.
- _____13. I can analyze my emotions and determine if they are reasonable or not.
- _____14. I can engage or detach from an emotion depending on whether I find it informative or useful.
- _____15. When I'm feeling sad, I know how to seek out activities that will make me happy.
- _____16. I can create situations that will cause others to experience specific emotions.
- _____17. I can use my understanding of emotions to have more productive interactions with others.
- _____18. I know how to make other people happy or sad.

_____19. I often lift people's spirits when they are feeling down.

_____20. I know how to generate negative emotions and enhance pleasant ones in my interactions with others.

Scoring:

EQ Model part	Item Range	Total
Understanding Emotions	6, 7, 8, 9, & 10	
Managing Emotions	11, 12, 13, 14, & 15	
Using Emotions	16, 17, 18, 19, & 20	
Perceiving Emotions	1, 2, 3, 4, & 5	

Interpretation:

Each of the four parts of the EQ Model can have a range of 5 to 25. Scores under 11 represent low levels of EQ for each aspect. Scores between 12 and 18 represent average levels of EQ. Scores 19 and higher represent high levels of EQ.

Research Spotlight



In 2020, researchers Anna Wollny, Ingo Jacobs, and Luise Pabel set out to examine the impact that trait EQ has on both relationship satisfaction and dyadic coping. Dyadic coping is based on Guy Bodenmann's Systemic Transactional Model (STM), which predicts that stress in dyadic relationships is felt by both partners.²³ So, if one partner experiences the stress of a job loss, that stress really impacts both partners. As a result, both partners can engage in mutual shared problem-solving or joint emotion regulation.²⁴ According to Bodenmann, there are three different common forms of dyadic coping:

- Positive dyadic coping involves providing problem- and emotion-focused support, as well as reducing the partner's stress through a new division of responsibilities and contributions to the coping process.
- Common dyadic coping (i.e., joint dyadic coping) includes strategies in which both partners jointly engage to reduce stress (e.g., exchange tenderness, joint problem-solving).
- Negative dyadic coping comprises insufficient support and ambivalent or hostile intervention attempts (e.g., reluctant provision of support while believing that the

partner should solve the problem alone).²⁵

In the Wollny et al. (2000) study, the researchers studied 136 heterosexual couples. Trait EQ was positively related to relationship satisfaction. Trait EQ was positively related to both positive and common dyadic coping, but not to negative dyadic coping.

Letting Go of Negative Thoughts

We often refer to these negative thoughts as vulture statements (as discussed in [Chapter 3](#)).²⁶ Some of us have huge, gigantic vultures sitting on our shoulders every day, and we keep feeding them with all of our negative thoughts. Right when that thought enters your head, you have started to feed that vulture sitting on your shoulders.

Unfortunately, many of us will focus on that negative thought and hold it in our minds for a long period. It's like have a bag full of carrion, and we keep lifting it to the vulture, who just keeps getting fatter and fatter, weighing you down more and more.

Every time we point out a negative thought instead of harping on that thought, we take a pause and stop feeding the vulture. Do this long enough, and you will see the benefits to your self-concept. Furthermore, when we have a healthy self-concept, we also have stronger interpersonal relationships.²⁷

Positive Emotions During Conflict

Researchers have found that serious relationship problems arise when those in the relationship cannot move beyond the immediate conflict and incorporate both positive and negative emotions into their discussions. In a landmark study of newlywed couples, for example, researchers attempted to predict who would have a happy marriage versus an unhappy marriage or a divorce, based on how the newlyweds communicated with each other. Specifically, they created a stressful conflict situation for couples. The researchers then evaluated how often the newlyweds expressed positive emotions and how often they expressed negative emotions when discussing the situation with each other.

When the marital status and happiness of each couple were evaluated over the next six years, the study found that the strongest predictor of a marriage that stayed together and was happy was the degree of positive emotions expressed during the conflict situation in the initial interview.²⁸

In happy marriages, instead of always responding to anger with anger, couples find a way to lighten the tension and de-escalate the conflict. In long-lasting marriages, during stressful times or in the midst of conflict, couples were able to inject some positive comments and show positive regard for each other. When this finding is generalized to other types of interpersonal relationships, it makes a strong case for incorporating some positive interactions, humor, light-hearted fun, or playfulness into conversations while trying to resolve conflicts.

Key Takeaways

- Emotions are physical reactions to external stimuli, while feelings are shaped by personal interpretations, memory, expectations, and personality. Although interrelated, emotions and feelings serve distinct functions. Emotions are typically temporary and intense (e.g., joy, fear), while feelings are more enduring and subjective (e.g., happiness, worry).
- Emotional awareness refers to the ability to identify and articulate one's emotions. Many people lack the vocabulary to express their emotions, which can hinder interpersonal communication. Developing a richer emotional vocabulary enables individuals to express their needs more clearly and resolve relational challenges more effectively.
- “I” statements take personal responsibility for emotions and help de-escalate conflict, while “you” statements tend to assign blame and provoke defensiveness. Using “I feel... because I need...” allows individuals to express emotions in a constructive way tied to unmet or fulfilled relational needs.
- Emotional intelligence (EQ) encompasses four core skills: perceiving, understanding, managing, and using emotions. These skills support healthier communication and relationship satisfaction. Higher EQ is associated with better dyadic coping strategies, including mutual problem-solving and emotional support.
- Cultivating positive emotions during conflict can strengthen interpersonal relationships. Couples and individuals who incorporate humor, warmth, and affirmation into their conflict discussions are more likely to form lasting, satisfying connections.

Exercises

1. Think of an extreme emotion you've felt recently. Explain the interrelationships between that emotion, your thoughts, and your feelings when you experienced that extreme emotion.
2. Complete the Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire. What areas are your strengths regarding EQ? What areas are your weaknesses? How can you go about improving your strengths while alleviating your weaknesses?
3. Think of a conflict you've had with a significant other in your relationship. How many of the statements that were made during that conflict were “You” statements as compared to “I” statements? How could you have more clearly expressed your feelings

and linked them to your needs?

Power and Influence

Learning Objectives

1. Define influence and distinguish among the three levels of influence.
2. Differentiate between accidental, expressive, and rhetorical communication.
3. Define power and identify the six bases of power.
4. Understand how different bases of power affect levels of influence.
5. Apply theories of influence and power to real-life interpersonal dynamics.

One of the primary reasons we engage in a variety of interpersonal relationships over our lifetimes is to influence others. We live in a world where we constantly need to accomplish a variety of goals, so being able to get others to join us in our goals is a crucial part of social survival. As such, we define **influence** when an individual or group of people alters another person's thinking, feelings, and/or behaviors through accidental, expressive, or rhetorical communication.²⁹ Notice this definition of influence is one that focuses on the importance of communication within the interaction. Within this definition, we discuss three specific types of communication: accidental, expressive, or rhetorical.

First, we have accidental communication, or when we send messages to another person without realizing that those messages are being sent. Imagine you are walking through your campus's food court and notice a table set up for a specific charity. A person we really respect is sitting at the table, laughing and smiling, so you decide to donate a dollar to the charity. The person who was hanging out at the table influenced your decision to donate. They could have just been talking to another friend and may not have even been a genuine supporter of the charity, but their presence was enough to influence your decision to donate. At the same time, we often influence others to think, feel, and behave in ways they wouldn't have unconsciously. A smile, a frown, a head nod, or eye aversion can all be nonverbal indicators to other people, which could influence them. There's a great commercial on television that demonstrates this. The commercial begins with someone holding the door for another person. This person turns around and does something kind for another person, and this "paying it forward" gesture continues throughout the entire commercial. In each incident, no one said to the person they were helping, "pay it forward"; they just did.

The second type of communication we can have is **expressive** or **emotionally-based communication**. Our emotional states can often influence those around us. If we are happy, others can become happy, and if we are sad, others may avoid us altogether. Maybe you've walked into a room and seen someone crying, so you ask, "Are you OK?" Instead of responding, the person turns and

glowers at you, so you turn around and leave. With just one look, this person influenced your behavior.

The final type of communication, **rhetorical communication**, involves purposefully creating and sending messages to another person hoping to alter another person's thinking, feelings, and/or behaviors. Accidental communication is not planned. Expressive communication is often not conscious at all. However, rhetorical communication is purposeful. When we are using rhetorical communication to influence another person(s), we know that we are trying to influence that person(s).

Levels of Influence

In 1958, social psychologist Herbert Kelman first noted that there are three basic levels of influence: compliance, identification, and internalization.³⁰ Kelman's basic theory was that changes in a person's thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors occur at different levels, which results in different processes an individual uses to achieve conformity with an influencer. Let's look at each of these three levels separately.

Compliance

The first, and weakest, form of influence is compliance. **Compliance** implies that an individual accepts influence and alters their thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors. However, this change in thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors is transitory and only lasts as long as the individual sees compliance as beneficial.³¹ People accept influence at this level because they perceive the rewards or punishments for influence to be in their best interest. As such, this form of influence is very superficial.³²

Identification

The second form of influence discussed by Kelman is **identification**, which is based purely in the realm of relationships. Identification occurs when an individual accepts influence because they want to have a satisfying relationship with the influencer or influencing group. "The individual actually believes in the responses which he [or she] adopts through identification, but their specific content is more or less irrelevant. He [or she] adopts the induced behavior because it is associated with the desired relationship. Thus, the satisfaction derived from identification because of the act of conforming as such."³³ Notice that Kelman is arguing that the actual change to thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors is less of an issue than the relationship and the act of conforming. However, if an individual ever decides that the relationship and identification with the influencing individual or group are not beneficial, then the influencing attempts will naturally dissipate, and the individual will revert to their original thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

Internalization

The final level of influence proposed by Kelman is **internalization**, which occurs when an individual adopts influence and alters their thinking, feeling, and/or behaviors because doing so is intrinsically rewarding. Ultimately, changing one's thinking, feelings, and/or behavior occurs at the

internalization level because an individual sees this change as either aligning with their value system, considers the helpful change, or fulfills a need they have. Influence that occurs at this level becomes highly intertwined with the individual's perception of themselves, making this type of influence long-lasting.

French & Raven's Five Bases of Power

When you hear the word “power,” what comes to mind? Perhaps you think of a powerful person, such as a Superhero or the President of the United States. For social scientists, we use the word “power” in a very specific way. **Power** is the degree that a social agent (A) has the ability to get another person(s) (P) to alter their thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors. First, you have a social agent (A), which can take various forms: another person, a role someone embodies, a group rule or norm, or a group or part of a group.³⁴ Next, we have the person(s) who is being influenced by the goal to be a specific change in thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors. When we discussed influence above, we talked about it in terms of communication: accidental, expressive, and rhetorical. When we deal with power, we are only dealing in the realm of rhetorical communication because the person exerting power over another person is consciously goal-directed.

Probably the most important people in the realm of power have been John French and Bertram Raven. In 1959, French and Raven identified five unique bases of power that people can use to influence others (coercive, reward, legitimate, expert, and referent).³⁵ At the time of their original publication, there was a sixth base of power that Raven attempted to argue for, informational. Although he lost the battle in the initial publication, subsequent research by Raven on the subject of the bases of power have all included informational power.³⁶ Let's examine each of these five bases of power.



Figure 9.1 French & Raven's Five Bases of Power

Informational

The first basis of power is the last one originally proposed by Raven.³⁷ **Informational power** refers to a social agent's ability to bring about a change in thought, feeling, and/or behavior through information. For example, since you initially started school, teachers have had informational power over you. They have provided you with a range of information on history, science, grammar, art, etc. that shape how you think (what constitutes history?), feel (what does it mean to be aesthetically pleasing?), and behave (how do you properly mix chemicals in a lab?). In some ways, informational power is very strong, because it's often the first form of power with which we come into contact. In fact, when you are taught how to think, feel, and/or behave, this change "now continues without the target necessarily referring to, or even remembering, the [influencer] as being the agent of change."³⁸

Coercive and Reward

The second base of power is **coercive power**, which is the ability to punish an individual who does not comply with one's influencing attempts. On the other end of the spectrum, we have **reward power** (3rd base of power), which is the ability to offer an individual rewards for complying with one's influencing attempts. We talk about these two bases of power together because they are two sides of the same coin. Furthermore, the same problems with this type of power apply equally to both. Influence can happen if you punish or reward someone; however, as soon as you take away that punishment or reward, the thoughts, feelings, and/or behavior will reverse back to its initial state. Hence, we refer to both coercive and reward power as attempts to influence someone to comply, as this is the highest level of influence one can hope to achieve with these two forms of power.

Legitimate

The fourth base of power is **legitimate power**, or influence that occurs because a person (P) believes that the social agent (A) has a valid right to influence P, and P has an obligation to accept A's attempt to influence P's thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors. French and Raven argued that there were two common forms of legitimate power: cultural and structural. Cultural legitimate power occurs when a change agent is perceived as having the authority to influence others due to their role within the culture. For example, in some cultures, the elderly may have a stronger right to influence than younger members of that culture. Structural legitimate power, on the other hand, occurs because someone fulfills a specific position within the social hierarchy. For example, your boss may have the legitimate right to influence your thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors in the workplace because they are above you in the organizational hierarchy.³⁹

Expert

The fifth base of power is **expert power**, or the power we give an individual to influence us because of their perceived knowledge. For example, we often give our physicians the ability to influence our behavior (e.g., eating right, exercising, taking medication) because we view these individu-

als as having specialized knowledge. However, this type of influence is only effective if P believes A is an expert, P trusts A, and P believes that A is telling the truth.

One problem we often face in the 21st Century involves the conceptualization of the word “expert.” Many people in today’s world can be perceived as “experts” simply because they have written a book, host a talk show, appeared on a reality TV show, or are featured on news programs.⁴⁰ Many of these so-called “experts” may have no reasonable skill or knowledge but they can be trumpeted as experts. One of the problems with the Internet is the fundamental flaw that anyone can put information online with only an opinion and no facts. Additionally, we often engage in debates about “facts” because we have different sources providing us with conflicting information. Historically, expert power was always a very strong form of power, but there is growing concern that we are losing expertise and knowledge to unsubstantiated opinions and rumor-mongering.

At the same time, there is considerable research demonstrating that many people are either unskilled or uninformed and completely unaware of their lack of expertise. This phenomenon has been referred to as the **Dunning–Kruger effect**, which describes the tendency of some individuals to overestimate their expertise when, in fact, they have no basis for that perception.⁴¹ As you can imagine, having a lot of people who think they are experts spouting off untrue information can be highly problematic in society. For example, do you really want to take medical advice from a TV star? Many people do. While we have some people who inflate their expertise, on the other end of the spectrum, some people suffer from impostor syndrome, which occurs when people devalue or simply do not recognize their knowledge and skills. Impostor syndrome is generally a problem experienced by highly educated individuals, such as doctors, lawyers, professors, and business executives. The fear is that someone will discover they are a fraud.

Referent

The final base of power originally discussed by French and Raven is **referent power**, or a social agent’s ability to influence another person because P wants to be associated with A. Ultimately, referent power is about building relationships and the desire for a connection. If A is a person P finds attractive, then P will do whatever they need to do to become associated with A. If A belongs to a group, then P will want to join that group. Ultimately, this relationship exists because P wants to think, feel, and behave as A does. For example, if A decides that he likes modern art, then P will also choose to like contemporary art. If A has a very strong work ethic in the workplace, then P will likely adopt a strong work ethic as well. Often A has no idea of the influence they are having over P. Ultimately, the stronger P desires to be associated with A, the more referent power A has over P.

Influence and Power

By now, you may be wondering about the relationship between influence and power. Research has examined the relationship between the three levels of influence and the six bases of power. Coercive, reward, and legitimate power only influence people at the compliance level. Whereas, informational, expert, and referent power have been shown to influence people at all three levels of influence: compliance, identification, and internalization.⁴² When you think about your own interpersonal

influencing goals, you really need to consider what level of influence you desire a person's change in thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors to be. If your goal is simply to effect change quickly, then using coercive, reward, and legitimate power may be the best approach. If, however, you want to ensure long-term influence, then using informational, expert, and referent power are probably the best routes to use.

Research Spotlight



In 2013, Shireen Abuhatum and Nina Howe set out to explore how siblings use French and Raven's bases of power in their relationships.⁴³ Specifically, they examined how older siblings (average age of 7 years old) interacted with their younger siblings (average age was 4 ½ years old). Sibling pairs were recorded playing at home with a wooden farm set that was provided for the observational study. Each recorded video lasted for 15-minutes. The researchers then coded the children's verbal and nonverbal behavior. The goal was to see what types of power strategies the siblings employed while playing.

Unsurprisingly, older siblings were more likely to engage in power displays with their younger siblings to get what they wanted. However, younger siblings were more likely to appeal to a third party (usually an adult) to get their way.

The researchers also noted that when it came to getting a desired piece of the farm to play with, older siblings were more likely to use coercive power. Younger siblings were more likely to employ legitimate power as a means of achieving a compromise.

Key Takeaways

- Influence refers to any alteration of a person's thoughts, feelings, or behaviors that results from communication. It can be accidental (unintentional signals), expressive (emotion-driven), or rhetorical (deliberate).
- Herbert Kelman proposed three levels of influence:
 - Compliance—superficial agreement motivated by reward or punishment.
 - Identification—agreement driven by a desire to maintain a relationship.
 - Internalization—deep agreement because the message aligns with personal values.
- French and Raven defined six bases of power:
 - Informational Power: Changing others through knowledge sharing.

- Coercive Power: Using threats or punishments to influence.
- Reward Power: Using incentives to drive behavior.
- Legitimate Power: Based on perceived right to influence due to cultural or structural roles.
- Expert Power: Derived from perceived knowledge or skill.
- Referent Power: Based on admiration or desire to be associated with the influencer.
- Coercive, reward, and legitimate power often result in compliance only. Informational, expert, and referent power can lead to deeper levels of influence, including identification and internalization.
- Influence and power are central to interpersonal relationships, and understanding how they function helps individuals become more effective communicators and relationship builders.

Exercises

1. Think of a time when you've been influenced at all three of Kelman's levels of influence. How were these situations of influence different from each other? How were the various levels of influence achieved?
2. Think of each of the following situations and which form of power would best be used and why:
 1. A mother wants her child to eat his vegetables.
 2. A police officer wants to influence people to slow down in residential neighborhoods.
 3. The Surgeon General of the United States wants people to become more aware of the problems associated with trans-saturated fats in their diets.
 4. A friend wants to influence his best friend to stop doing drugs.

Conflict Management Strategies

Learning Objectives

1. Differentiate between conflict and disagreement.

2. Classify the three primary styles of conflict management.
3. Identify common tactics used in avoidant, distributive, and integrative strategies.
4. Apply the STLC Conflict Model to real-life scenarios.
5. Reflect on personal approaches to managing conflict using mindfulness strategies.

Many researchers have attempted to understand how humans handle conflict with one another. The first researchers to create a taxonomy for understanding conflict management strategies were Richard E. Walton and Robert B. McKersie.⁴⁴ Walton and McKersie were primarily interested in how individuals handle conflict during labor negotiations. The Walton and McKersie model consisted of only two methods for managing conflict: integrative and distributive. **Integrative conflict** is a win-win approach to conflict; whereby, both parties attempt to come to a settled agreement that is mutually beneficial. **Distributive conflict** is a win-lose approach; whereby, conflicting parties see their job as to win and make sure the other person or group loses. Most professional schools teach that integrative negotiation tactics are generally the best ones.

ABCs of Conflict Management

Over the years, a number of different patterns for handling conflict have arisen in the literature, but most of them agree with the first two proposed by Walton and McKersie, but they add a third dimension of conflict: **avoidance**. Go ahead and take a moment to complete the ABC's of Conflict Management questionnaire.

ABCs of Conflict Management

Instructions: Read the following questions and select the answer that corresponds with how you typically behave when engaged in conflict with another person. Do not be concerned if some of the items appear similar. Please use the scale below to rate the degree to which each statement applies to you.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

When I start to engage in a conflict, I _____

_____1. Keep the conflict to myself to avoid rocking the boat.

_____2. Do my best to win.

_____3. Try to find a solution that works for everyone.

- _____4. Do my best to stay away from disagreements that arise.
- _____5. Create a strategy to ensure my successful outcome.
- _____6. Try to find a solution that is beneficial for those involved.
- _____7. Avoid the individual with whom I'm having the conflict.
- _____8. Won't back down unless I get what I want.
- _____9. Collaborate with others to find an outcome OK for everyone.
- _____10. Leave the room to avoid dealing with the issue.
- _____11. Take no prisoners.
- _____12. Find solutions that satisfy everyone's expectations.
- _____13. Shut down and shut up in order to get it over with as quickly as possible.
- _____14. See it as an opportunity to get what I want.
- _____15. Try to integrate everyone's ideas to come up with the best solution for everyone.
- _____16. Keep my disagreements to myself.
- _____17. Don't let up until I win.
- _____18. Openly raise everyone's concerns to ensure the best outcome possible.

Scoring:

Subscale	Items to add	Total
Avoiders	1, 4, 7, 10, 13, 16	
Battlers	2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 17	
Collaborators	3, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18	

Interpretation:

Scores for each subscale should range from 6 to 30. Scores under 14 are considered low, scores 15 to 23 are considered moderate, and scores over 24 are considered high.

Avoiders

Alan Sillars and his colleagues developed a taxonomy of various strategies that individuals can employ to avoid conflict. Table 9.6 provides a list of these common tactics.⁴⁵



Figure 9.2 Conflict Management Styles

Table 9.6 Avoidant Conflict Management Strategies

Conflict Management Tactic	Definition	Example
Simple Denial	Statements that deny the conflict.	"No, I'm perfectly fine."
Extended Denial	Statements that deny conflict with a short justification.	"No, I'm perfectly fine. I just had a long night."
Underresponsiveness	Statements that deny the conflict and then pose a question to the conflict partner.	"I don't know why you are upset, did you wake up on the wrong side of the bed this morning?"
Topic Shifting	Statements that shift the interaction away from the conflict.	"Sorry to hear that. Did you hear about the mall opening?"
Topic Avoidance	Statements designed to clearly stop the conflict.	"I don't want to deal with this right now."
Abstractness	Statements designed to shift a conflict from concrete factors to more abstract ones.	"Yes, I know I'm late. But what is time really except a construction of humans to force conformity?"
Semantic Focus	Statements focused on the denotative and connotative definitions of words.	"So, what do you mean by the word 'sex'?"
Process Focus	Statements focused on the "appropriate" procedures for handling conflict.	"I refuse to talk to you when you are angry."
Joking	Humorous statements designed to derail conflict.	"That's about as useless as a football bat."
Ambivalence	Statements designed to indicate a lack of caring.	"Whatever!" "Just do what you want."
Pessimism	Statements that devalue the purpose of	"What's the point of fighting over

Conflict Management Tactic	Definition	Example
	conflict.	this? Neither of us are changing our minds.”
Evasion	Statements designed to shift the focus of the conflict.	“I hear the Joneses down the street have that problem, not us.”
Stalling	Statements designed to shift the conflict to another time.	“I don’t have time to talk about this right now.”
Irrelevant Remark	Statements that have nothing to do with the conflict.	“I never knew the wallpaper in here had flowers on it.”

Battlers

For our purposes, we have opted to describe those who engage in distributive conflict as battlers because they often view entering a conflict as akin to going to war, which is most appropriately aligned with distributive conflict management strategies. Battlers believe that conflict should take on an approach where the battler must win the conflict at all costs without regard to the damage they might cause along the way. Furthermore, battlers tend to be very personalistic in their goals and are often highly antagonistic toward those individuals with whom they are engaging in conflict.⁴⁶

Sillars et al. developed a taxonomy of various types of strategies that individuals can employ when utilizing distributive conflict management approaches. Table 9.7 provides a list of these common tactics.⁴⁷

Table 9.7 Distributive Conflict Management Strategies

Conflict Management Tactic	Definition	Example
Faulting	Statements that verbally criticize a partner.	“Wow, I can’t believe you are so dense at times.”
Rejection	Statements that express antagonistic disagreement.	“That is such a dumb idea.”
Hostile Questioning	Questions designed to fault a partner.	“Who died and made you king?”
Hostile Joking	Humorous statements designed to attack a partner.	“I do believe a village has lost its idiot.”
Presumptive Attribution	Statements designed to point the meaning or origin of the conflict to another source.	“You just think that because your father keeps telling you that.”
Avoiding Responsibility	Statements that deny fault.	“Not my fault, not my problem.”
Prescription	Statements that describe a specific change to another’s behavior.	“You know, if you’d just stop yelling, maybe people would take you seriously.”

Conflict Management Tactic	Definition	Example
Threat	Statements designed to inform a partner of a future punishment.	“You either tell your mother we’re not coming, or I’m getting a divorce attorney.”
Blame	Statements that lay culpability for a problem on a partner.	“It’s your fault we got ourselves in this mess in the first place.”
Shouting	Statements delivered in a manner with an increased volume.	“DAMMIT! GET YOUR ACT TOGETHER!”
Sarcasm	Statements involving the use of irony to convey contempt, mock, insult, or wound another person.	“The trouble with you is that you lack the power of conversation but not the power of speech.”

Collaborators

The last type of conflicting partners are collaborators. There are a range of collaborative choices, from being completely collaborative to find a mutually agreed-upon solution, to being compromising when you realize that both sides will need to win and lose a little to come to a satisfactory solution. In both cases, the goal is to use prosocial communicative behaviors in an attempt to reach a solution everyone is happy with. Admittedly, this is often easier said than done. Furthermore, one side may claim to want to collaborate, while the other side refuses to collaborate at all. When this happens, collaborative conflict management strategies may not be as effective, because it’s hard to collaborate with someone who truly believes you need to lose the conflict.

Sillars et al. developed a taxonomy of various strategies that individuals can employ when collaborating during a conflict. Table 9.8 provides a list of these common tactics.⁴⁸

Table 9.8 Integrative Conflict Management Strategies

Conflict Management Tactic	Definition	Example
Descriptive Acts	Statements that describe obvious events or factors.	“Last time your sister babysat our kids, she yelled at them.”
Qualification	Statements that explicitly explain the conflict.	“I am upset because you didn’t come home last night.”
Disclosure	Statements that disclose one’s thoughts and feelings in a non-judgmental way.	“I get really worried when you don’t call and let me know where you are.”
Soliciting Disclosure	Questions that ask another person to disclose their thoughts and feelings.	“How do you feel about what I just said?”
Negative Inquiry	Statements allowing for the other person to identify your negative behaviors.	“What is it that I do that makes you yell at me?”

Conflict Management Tactic	Definition	Example
Empathy	Statements that indicate you understand and relate to the other person's emotions and experiences.	"I know this isn't easy for you."
Emphasize Commonalities	Statements that highlight shared goals, aims, and values.	"We both want what's best for our son."
Accepting Responsibility	Statements acknowledging the part you play within a conflict.	"You're right. I sometimes let my anger get the best of me."
Initiating Problem-Solving	Statements designed to help the conflict come to a mutually agreed upon solution.	"So let's brainstorm some ways that will help us solve this."
Concession	Statements designed to give in or yield to a partner's goals, aims, or values.	"I promise, I will make sure my homework is complete before I watch television."

Before we conclude this section, we would like to point out that others often reciprocate with conflict management strategies. If you initiate a conflict in a highly competitive manner, do not be surprised when your conflicting partner responds in kind and adopts distributive conflict management strategies in return. The same is also true for integrative conflict management strategies. When you start using integrative conflict management strategies, you can often de-escalate a problematic conflict by employing these strategies.⁴⁹

STLC Conflict Model

Ruth Anna Abigail and Dudley Cahn developed a straightforward model for understanding how we communicate during conflict.⁵⁰ They called the model the STLC Conflict Model because it stands for stop, think, listen, then communicate.

Stop

The first thing an individual needs to do when interacting with another person during conflict is to take the time to be present within the conflict itself. Too often, people engaged in a conflict say whatever enters their mind before they've really had a chance to process the message and think of the best strategies to use to send that message. Others end up talking past one another during a conflict because they simply are not paying attention to each other and the competing needs within the conflict. Communication problems often occur during conflict because people tend to react to conflict situations as they arise, rather than being mindful and present during the conflict itself. For this reason, it's always important to take a breath during a conflict and first stop.



Figure 9.3 STLC Conflict Model

Sometimes these “time outs” need to be physical. Perhaps you need to leave the room and take a brief walk to calm down, or maybe you just need to get a glass of water. Whatever you need to do, it’s essential to take this break. This break takes you out of a “reactive stance into a proactive one.”⁵¹

Think

Once you’ve stopped, you can now really think about what you are communicating. You want to think through the conflict itself. What is the conflict really about? Often people engage in conflicts about superficial items when there are truly much deeper issues that are being avoided. You also want to consider what possible causes led to the conflict and what possible courses of action you think are possible to conclude the conflict. Cahn and Abigail argue that four possible outcomes can occur: doing nothing, changing oneself, changing the other person, or changing the situation.

First, you can sit back and avoid the conflict. Maybe you’re engaged in a conflict about politics with a family member, and this conflict is actually just going to make everyone mad. For this reason, you opt to stop the conflict and change topics to avoid upsetting people. One of our coauthors was at a funeral when an uncle asked our coauthor about our coauthor’s impression of the current President. Our coauthor’s immediate response was, “Do you really want me to answer that question?” Our coauthor knew that everyone else in the room would completely disagree, so our coauthor knew this was probably a can of worms that didn’t need to be opened.

Second, we can change ourselves. Often, we are at fault and start conflicts. We may not even realize how our behavior caused the conflict until we take a step back and really analyze what is happening. When it comes to being at fault, it’s very important to admit that you’ve done wrong. Nothing is worse (and can stoke a conflict more) than when someone refuses to see their part in the conflict.

Third, we can attempt to change the other person. Let’s face it, changing someone else is easier said than done. Just ask your parents/guardians! All of our parents/guardians have attempted to change our behavior at one point or another, and changing people is very hard. Even with the powers of punishment and reward, many changes only last as long as the punishment or the reward.

One of our coauthors was in a constant battle with our coauthors' parents about thumb sucking as a child. Our coauthor's parents tried everything to get the thumb sucking to stop. They finally devised an ingenious plan. They agreed to buy a toy electric saw if their child didn't engage in thumb sucking for the entire month. Well, for a whole month, no thumb sucking occurred at all. The child got the toy saw, and immediately inserted the thumb back into our coauthor's mouth. This short story is an excellent illustration of the problems that can arise from rewards. Punishment works the same way. As long as people are being punished, they will behave in a specific way. If that punishment is ever taken away, so will the behavior.

Lastly, we can just change the situation. Having a conflict with your roommates? Move out. Having a conflict with your boss? Find a new job. Having a conflict with a professor? Drop the course. Admittedly, changing the situation is not necessarily the first choice people should make when considering possibilities, but often it's the best decision for long-term happiness. In essence, some conflicts will not be settled between people. When these conflicts arise, you can try and change yourself, hope the other person will change (they probably won't, though), or get out of it altogether.

Listen

The third step in the STLC model is listen. Humans are not always the best listeners. As we discussed in [Chapter 7](#), listening is a skill. Unfortunately, during a conflict situation, this is a skill that is desperately needed and often forgotten. When we feel defensive during a conflict, our listening becomes spotty at best, as we start to focus on ourselves and protecting ourselves instead of trying to be empathetic and seeing the conflict through the other person's eyes.

One mistake some people make is to think they're listening, but in reality, they're listening for flaws in the other person's argument. We often use this type of selective listening as a way to devalue the other person's stance. In essence, we will identify one small flaw in what the other person is saying and then use that flaw to demonstrate that, by implication, everything else must be wrong as well.

The goal of listening is to suspend your judgment and genuinely attempt to be present enough to interpret the message being sent by the other person accurately. When we listen in this highly empathic way, we are often able to see things from the other person's point of view, which can help us achieve a better-negotiated outcome in the long run.

Communicate

Lastly, but certainly not least, we communicate with the other person. Notice that Cahn and Abigail place communication as the last part of the STLC model because it's the most challenging aspect to execute effectively during a conflict if the first three are not addressed correctly. When we communicate during a conflict, we must be hyper-aware of our nonverbal behavior (eye movement, gestures, posture, etc.). Nothing will kill a message faster than when it's accompanied by bad nonverbal behavior. For example, rolling one's eyes while another person is speaking is not an effective way to engage in conflict. One of our coauthors used to work with two women who clearly despised each other. They would never openly say something negative about the other person publicly, but in meetings, one would roll her eyes and make these non-word sounds of disagreement. The other

one would smile, slow her speech, and look in the other woman's direction. Everyone around the conference table knew exactly what was transpiring, yet no words needed to be uttered at all.

During a conflict, it's essential to be assertive and stand up for your ideas without becoming verbally aggressive. Conversely, you have to be open to someone else's use of assertiveness as well without having to tolerate verbal aggression. We often end up using mediators to help call people on the carpet when they communicate in a fashion that is verbally aggressive or does not further the conflict itself. As Cahn and Abigail note, "People who are assertive with one another have the greatest chance of achieving mutual satisfaction and growth in their relationship."⁵²

Mindfulness Activity

The STLC Model for Conflict is highly aligned with our discussion of mindful interpersonal relationships in this book. Taylor Rush, a clinical psychologist working for the Cleveland Clinic's Center for Neuro-Restoration, recommends seven considerations for ensuring mindfulness while engaged in conflict:



1. **Set intentions.** What do you want to be discussed during this interaction? What do you want to learn from the other person? What do you want to happen as a result of this conversation? Set your intentions early and check in along the way to keep the conversation on point.
2. **Stay present to the situation.** Try to keep assumptions at bay and ask open-ended questions better to understand the other person's perspective and experiences.
3. **Stay aware of your inner reactions.** Disrupt the automatic feedback loop between your body and your thoughts. Acknowledge distressing or judgmental thoughts and feelings without reacting to them. Then check them against the facts of the situation.
4. **Take one good breath before responding.** A brief pause can mean all the difference between opting for a thoughtful response or knee-jerk reaction.
5. **Use reflective statements.** This is a tried and true strategy for staying present. It allows you to fully concentrate on what the other person is saying (rather than form your rebuttal) and shows the other person you have an interest in what they are actually saying. This will make them more likely to reciprocate!
6. **Remember, it's not all about you.** The ultimate objective is that both parties are heard and find the conversation beneficial. Try to actively take the other person's perspective and cultivate compassion (even if you fundamentally do not agree with their position). This makes conflict escalation much less likely.

7. **Investigate afterward.** What do you feel now that the conversation is over? What was the overall tone of the conversation? Do you feel like you understand the other person's perspective? Do they understand yours? Will this require further conversation or has the issue been resolved? Asking these questions will help you to hone your practice for the future.⁵³

For this activity, we would like you to reflect on a recent conflict you experienced with another person (e.g., coworker, friend, family member, romantic partner). Answer the following questions:

1. If you used the STLC Model for Conflict, how effective was it for you? Why?
2. If you did not use the STLC Model for Conflict, do you think you could have benefited from this approach? Why?
3. Looking at Rush's seven strategies for engaging in mindful conflict, did you engage in all of them? If you didn't engage in them all, which ones did you engage in, and which ones didn't you engage in? How could engaging in all seven of them have helped your conflict management with this person?
4. If you haven't already, take a moment to think about the questions posed in #7 of Rush's list. What can you learn from this conflict that will help prepare you for future conflicts with this person or future conflicts more broadly?

Key Takeaways

- A conflict occurs when two people perceive incompatible goals or values, often accompanied by emotional intensity. A disagreement or argument, in contrast, involves differences of opinion without the same level of emotional volatility.
- There are three primary styles of conflict management:
 1. Avoidant (avoiders): People who attempt to evade conflict entirely.
 2. Distributive (battlers): People who view conflict as win-lose and aim to dominate.
 3. Integrative (collaborators): People who work toward mutually beneficial, win-win solutions.
- Each conflict style includes a range of specific tactics. Avoidant tactics include denial, topic shifting, and ambivalence. Battlers use faulting, threats, sarcasm, and rejection. Collaborators employ empathy, problem-solving, and accepting responsibility to resolve issues cooperatively.
- The STLC Model includes four steps: Stop, Think, Listen, and Communicate. Stop to be

mindful in the moment, Think through the conflict and possible outcomes, Listen empathically without defensiveness, and Communicate assertively and constructively.

- Mindfulness strategies such as setting intentions, staying present, and reflecting afterward can improve conflict outcomes. These practices encourage emotional regulation, understanding others’ perspectives, and reaching productive resolutions.

Exercises

1. Think of a time when a simple disagreement escalated to a conflict. What happened? Why did this escalation occur?
2. During conflict, do you think it’s appropriate to use all three forms of conflict management? Why?
3. Think of a recent interpersonal conflict that you had that went badly. How could you have implemented the STLC Model of Conflict to improve what happened during that conflict?

Key Terms

accidental communication	expert power
alexithymia	expressive communication
argument	feelings
avoidance	identification
coercive power	influence
compliance	informational power
conflict	integrative conflict
disagreement	interdependence
distributive conflict	internalization
Dunning–Kruger effect	legitimate power
emotional awareness	power
emotions	procedural disagreements
emotional intelligence	referent power

reward power**tolerance for disagreement****rhetorical communication****“you” statements****substantive disagreement**

Chapter Wrap-Up

At the beginning of this chapter, conflict in interpersonal relationships is inevitable. The only way relationships can truly grow is through conflict; therefore, learning how to manage conflict effectively is essential for maintaining successful interpersonal relationships.

Chapter Exercises

Real-World Case Study

Paul has been in a yearlong relationship with his boyfriend Bill. Paul really loves the idea of being in love, but he's not in love with Bill at all. Unfortunately, on Valentine's Day, he made the mistake of telling Bill that he loved him, even though he doesn't. As far as Paul is concerned, he could end the relationship today.

Bill fell madly in love with Paul almost immediately after they started hanging out and going to the gym together. One day, when Bill and Paul were hanging out watching TV, he looked at Paul and told him he loved him. Bill immediately noticed that Paul looked like a deer in headlights and let him off easy, saying, “There's no need to say it back if you're not ready to do so.”

Ultimately, the relationship evolved into something more akin to a genuine friendship than a romantic one. The two hung out and went to dinner, and saw movies, but they were never really intimate with one another. Paul kept up the charade because he kind of liked some of the perks of being in a relationship. He liked having someone to hang out with all the time. He enjoyed having someone clean his house and cook for him. He liked having someone who would look after his cats when he went on vacation.

Over time, Bill began to realize that something was amiss in the relationship. One day, when he and Paul were talking about the future, he told Paul, “I want to be everything for you.” He immediately saw that, once again, Paul looked like a deer trapped in headlights. Over time, Bill began to notice that Paul was growing increasingly distant. He really loved Paul, but he began to realize that it wasn't being reciprocated in the same way. Instead of saying something, he just shook the thoughts out of his mind and kept going.

1. Would you classify this as a healthy relationship?
2. Why do you think Paul has such a hard time being honest with Bill?
3. Why do you think Bill was so determined to make the relationship work when it was clearly not being reciprocated?

4. How would you describe the emotional quality of this relationship?
5. How do you think this couple would engage in conflict?

End-of-Chapter Assessment

1. Jonathan loves to debate a wide range of ideas. In fact, he has no problems arguing for or against something just to engage in a healthy debate with another person. Which personality trait does Jonathan exhibit?
 - a. need for cognition
 - b. argumentativeness proneness
 - c. conflict avoidance
 - d. high tolerance for disagreement
2. Which of the following represents a nonviolent communicative message?
 - a. silence
 - b. placating
 - c. playing games
 - d. aggressive behavior
 - e. violence
3. Which of the following is not an effective statement when communicating about one's feelings?
 - a. "If you flirt with one more person, I'm going to hurt myself, and it will be your fault."
 - b. "I hate it when you flirt with other people."
 - c. "I feel lonely when you flirt with other people because I need emotional safety."
 - d. "You make me feel like a piece of trash when you flirt with other people."
4. Viivi is a Norwegian language instructor. As she teaches about Norwegian, she also peppers in a variety of culture factors into her teachings. One of her students, Jim, really wants to spend a summer abroad in Norway, so Jim listens attentively to everything Viivi has to offer. Because of Viivi's knowledge of Norway, Jim hangs on every word. What type of power best represents Viivi's?
 - a. coercive
 - b. reward
 - c. legitimate
 - d. expert
 - e. referent
5. Hodoya is a Canadian union leader. She's currently involved in negotiations with a large uranium production company. Hodoya sees her job as the lead negotiator to get the best possible deal for her union members. As such, she goes into negotiations with a win-lose orientation. What type of conflict management strategies will Hodoya employ?
 - a. avoidance
 - b. distributive
 - c. competitive
 - d. collaborative

e. integrative

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Chapter 10: Friendship Relationships



“Best Friends Forever!” by [rajat.sarki](#) on [Unsplash](#)

When you hear the words “friend” or “friendship,” what comes to mind? In today’s society, the words “friend” and “friendship” can refer to a wide range of different relationships or attachments. We can be a “friend” of a library, museum, opera, theatre, etc.... We can be a “friend” to someone “in need.” We can “friend” thousands of people on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok. We can develop friendships with people in our day-to-day lives at work, in social groups, at school, at church, etc. Some people see their parents/guardians, spouses, and siblings as “friends.” Many of us even have one or more “best friends.” So, when we look at all of these different areas where we use the word “friend,” do we mean the same thing? For this chapter, we’re going to delve into the world of interpersonal friendships, which at least takes a few items off of our list (e.g., libraries, museums, operas, etc...). However, we’re still left with a term that is very difficult to define.

Beverley Fehr was one of the first scholars to note the problem related to defining the term “friendship,” “Everyone knows what friendship is – until asked to define it. There are virtually as many definitions of friendship as social scientists are studying the topic.”¹ Table 10.1 presents some sample definitions that exist in the literature for the terms “friend” or “friendship.”

Table 10.1 Defining Friendship

Type	Definition
Anthropological	“A friendship-like relationship is a social relationship in which partners provide support according to their abilities in times of need, and in which this behavior is motivated in part by positive affect between partners.”
Clinical Psychology	“[S]omeone who likes and wishes to do well for someone else and who believes that these feelings and good intentions are reciprocated by the other party.”
Dictionary	“The emotions or conduct of friends; the state of being friends.”
Evolutionary	“Friendship is a long-term, positive relationship that involves cooperation.”
Friendship as Love	“The etymology of word <i>friend</i> connects its meaning with love, freedom and choice, suggesting an ideal definition of friendship as a voluntary relationship that includes a mutual and equal emotional bond, mutual and equal care and goodwill, as well as pleasure.”
Legal	“Friendship is a word of broad and varied application. It is commonly used to describe the undefinable relationships which exist not only between those connected by ties of kinship or marriage, but as well between strangers in blood, and which vary in degree from the greatest intimacy to an acquaintance more or less casual.”
Personality	“[V]oluntary, mutual, flexible, and terminable; relationships that emphasize equality and reciprocity, and require from each partner an affective involvement in the total personality of the other.”
Philosophy	“[A] distinctively personal relationship that is grounded in a concern on the part of each friend for the welfare of the other, for the other’s sake, and that involves some degree of intimacy.”
Social Psychology	“[V]oluntary or unrestrained interaction in which the participants respond to one another personally, that is, as unique individuals rather than as packages of discrete attributes or mere role occupants.”

As you can see, there are several ways that scholars can define the term “friendship.” So, we must question whether defining the term “friendship” is the best way to start a discussion of this topic.

Friendship Relationships

Learning Objectives

1. Identify Rawlins' five key characteristics of friendship.
2. Explain how communication competence and communication apprehension influence friendship formation and maintenance.
3. Analyze the role of dialectical tensions in shaping the dynamics of friendship.
4. Differentiate between contextual and interactional dialectics in friendships.
5. Apply mindfulness strategies to enhance the quality of personal friendships.

In a 2017 book on the psychology of friendship, Michael Monsour asked the various chapter authors if they planned to define the term “friendship” within their chapters.² Monsour found that the majority of the authors planned on not defining the term “friendship,” but planned on identifying characteristics of the term “friendship.” We point this out because defining “friend” and “friendship” isn’t an easy task. We all probably all see our friendships as different, which is one reason why defining the terms is so hard. For our purposes in this chapter, we’re going to go along with the majority of friendship scholars and not provide a strict definition for the term friend.



Friendship Characteristics

William K. Rawlins, a communication scholar and one of the most influential figures in the study of friendship, argues that friendships possess five essential characteristics that distinguish them from other forms of interpersonal relationships: voluntary, personal, equal, involved, and affective (Figure 10.1).³

All Friendships are Essentially Voluntary

There’s an old saying that goes, “You can’t choose your family, but you can choose your friends.” This saying captures the fundamental idea that friendship relationships

Figure 10.1. Friendship Characteristics

are voluntary. Friendships are based on an individual’s free will to choose with whom they want to initiate a friendship relationship . We go through our lives constantly making decisions about whether to engage in a friendship with one person or not with another. Each and every one of us

has our reasons for friendships. For example, one of our coauthors originally established a friendship with a peer during graduate school because they were the two youngest people in the program. Here, the friendship was initiated because of demographic homophily but continues almost 20 years later because they established a deeper, more meaningful relationship. Take a moment to reflect on your friendships. Why did you decide to engage in those friendships? Of course, the opposite is also true. We meet some people and never end up in friendship with them. Sometimes it's because you're not interested or the other person isn't interested (voluntariness works both ways). We also choose to end some friendships when they are unhealthy or no longer serve a specific purpose within our lives.

Friendships are Personal Relationships that are Negotiated Between Two Individuals

The second quality of friendships is that they are personal relationships negotiated between two individuals. We create our friendships with individuals, and we negotiate what those relationships look like with each other. For example, let's imagine you meet a new person named Kris. When you enter into a relationship with Kris, you negotiate what that relationship will look like with Kris. If Kris is transgender, you are still entering a relationship with Kris and not with everyone who is transgender. Kris is not the ambassador for all things transgender for us, but a unique individual we decide we want to befriend. Hence, these are not group relationships; these are individualized, personal relationships that we establish with another person.

Friendships Have a Spirit of Equality

The next characteristic of friendships is a spirit of equality. "Although friendship may develop between individuals of different status, ability, attractiveness, or age, some facet of the relationship functions as a leveler. Friends emphasize the personal attributes and styles of interaction that make them appear more or less equal to each other."⁴ Now, it's important to note that we're not always talking about a 50/50 split in everything is what makes a friendship equal. Friendships ebb and flow over time as the desires, needs, and interests change. For example, two people from very different social classes can be friends. Here, the different social classes may put people at an imbalance in terms of financial means, but this doesn't mean that the two cannot still maintain a sense of equality within the relationship. Here are some ways to ensure that friendships maintain a spirit of equality:

1. Both friend's needs and desires are important, not just one person's.
2. Both friends are curious about their friend's personal lives away from the friendship.
3. Both friends show affection in their ways.
4. Both friends demonstrate effort and work in the relationship.
5. Both friends encourage each other's goals and dreams.
6. Both friends are responsible for mutual happiness.
7. Both friends decide what activities to pursue and how to have fun.
8. Both friends are mutually engaged in conversations.
9. Both friends carry each other's burdens.
10. Both friends desire for the relationship to continue and grow.

Friendships Have Mutual Involvement

The fourth characteristic of friendships is that they involve mutual involvement. For friendships to work, both parties have to be mutually engaged in the relationship. Now, this does not mean that friends have to talk on a daily, weekly, or even monthly basis for them to be effective. Many people establish long-term friendships with individuals they don't get to see more than once a year or even once a decade. For example, my father has a group of friends from high school once a year. His friends and their spouses pick a location, and they all meet up once a year for a week together. For the rest of the year, there are occasional emails and Facebook posts, but they interact little outside of that. However, the once-a-year get-together is enough to keep these long-term (70+ years at this point) friendships healthy and thriving.

As you can see, the concept of “mutual involvement” can differ from one friendship pair to another. Different friendship pairs collaborate to create their sense of what it means to be a friend, their shared social reality of friendship. “This interpersonal reality evolves out of and furthers mutual acceptance and support, trust and confidence, dependability and assistance, and discussion of thoughts and feelings.”⁵ One reason why defining the term “friendship” is so difficult is that there are as many friendship realities as there are pairs of friends. Although we observe common characteristics across them (as we're discussing here), it's essential to understand that within these characteristics, there are many ways in which they're exhibited.

Friendships Have Affective Aspects

The final characteristic of friendships is the notion of affect. **Affect** refers to “any experience of feeling or emotion, ranging from suffering to elation, from the simplest to the most complex sensations of feeling, and from the most normal to the most pathological emotional reactions. Often described in terms of positive affect or negative affect, both mood and emotion are affective states.”⁶ Built into the voluntariness, personal, equal, and mutually involved nature of friendships is the inherent caring and concern that we establish within those friendships, the affective aspects. Some friends will say that they love each other. Not in the *eros* or romantic sense of the term, but instead in the *philia* or affectionate sense of the term. People often use the term “platonic” love to describe the love that exists without physical attraction based on the writings of Plato. However, Aristotle, Plato's student, believed that *philia* was an even more profound form of dispassionate, virtuous love that existed in the loyalty of friends, void of any sexual connotations.

All friendships will have affective components, but not all friendships will exhibit or express affect in the same ways. Some friendships may exhibit no physical interaction at all, but this doesn't mean they are not intimate emotionally, intellectually, or spiritually. Other friendships could be very physically affective, but have little depth to them in other ways. Every pair of friends determines what affect will be like within that friendship pairing. However, both parties within the relationship must have their affect needs met. Hence, people often need to have conversations with friends about their needs for affection.

Communication and Friendship Formation

Now that we've explored the five basic characteristics of friendships, let's switch gears and focus on communication and friendships. This entire chapter focuses on communication and friendships, but we will explore two communication variables that significantly impact the formation of friendships.

Communication Competence

Previously in this book, we talked about the notion of **communication competence**. For our purposes, we used the definition from John Wiemann, "the ability of an interactant to choose among available communicative behaviors in order that he [she/they] may successfully accomplish his [her/their] own interpersonal goals, while maintaining the face and line of his [her/their] fellow interactants within the constraints of the situation."⁷ Not surprisingly, an individual's communication competence impacts their friendships. Kenneth Rubin and Linda Rose-Krasnor took communication competence a step further and referred to social communicative competencies, "ability to achieve personal goals in social interaction while simultaneously maintaining positive relationships."⁸ The most common place where we exhibit social competencies is within our friendships. Throughout our lifespans, we continually develop our social and communicative competencies through ongoing interactions with others. However, individuals with lower levels of competency will have problems in their day-to-day communicative interactions. Analisa Arroyo and Chris Segrin tested this idea and found that individuals who reported having lower levels of communication competence were less satisfied with their friendships. Furthermore, individuals who rated a specific friend as having lower levels of communication competency reported lower levels of both friendship satisfaction and commitment. Therefore, individuals with lower levels of communication competence are likely to experience difficulties in their communicative interactions with friends.

Communication Apprehension

Another variable of interest to communication scholars has been communication apprehension (CA). We also know that peers tend to undervalue their quieter peers, generally seeing them as less credible and socially attractive.⁹ In a study examining friendships among college students, college students indicated how many people they would classify as "good friends."¹⁰ For people with higher levels of CA, over a third of the quiet people reported having no good friends at all. No students with low or average levels of CA reported having no good friends. Over half of high-CA individuals also reported that family members were their good friends (e.g., siblings, parents/guardians, cousins). Less than 5% of individuals with low or average levels of CA mentioned relatives. Ultimately, we know it's harder for people with higher levels of CA to establish and maintain relationships. Furthermore, individuals with higher levels of CA are less satisfied with their communicative interactions with friends.¹¹

As you can see, both communication competence and CA are important precursors to effective communication that impact the establishment of strong friendship relationships.

Dialectical Approaches to Friendships

Earlier in this book, we introduced you to the dialectical perspective for understanding interpersonal relationships. William K. Rawlins proposed a dialectical approach to friendships.¹² The dialectics can be broken down into two distinct categories: contextual and interactional.

Contextual Dialectics

The first category of dialectics is **contextual dialectics**, which are dialectics that stem from the cultural order where friendship exists. If the friends in question live in the United States, then the prevailing social order in the United States will influence their friendship; however, if the friends are in Malaysia, then the Malaysian culture will be the prevailing social order that impacts their friendship. There are two different dialectics that Rawlins labeled as contextual: private/public and ideal/real.

Private/Public

The first friendship dialectic is the private/public dialectic. Let's start by examining the public side of friendships in the United States. Sadly, they aren't given much credence in the public space. For example, there are no laws protecting friendships. Your friends can't get health benefits from your job. Religious bodies don't recognize your friendships. As you can see, we're comparing friendships here to marriages, which do have religious and legal protections. In fact, in the legal system, family often takes precedence over friends, unless there is a power of attorney or a will.

As a significant historical side note, one of the biggest problems many gay and lesbian couples faced before marriage legalization was that their intimate partners were perceived as "friends" in the legal system. Family members could swoop in when Partner A passed and evict and confiscate all of Partner A's money and property unless there was an iron-clad will leaving the money and property to Partner B. From a legal perspective, marriage equality was very important in ensuring the rights of LGBTQIA2S+ individuals and their spouses.

On the opposite end of this dialectic, many friendship bonds are as strong, if not stronger, than familial or marital bonds. We voluntarily enter friendships and create our sense of purpose and behaviors outside of any religious or legal context. These friendships are autonomous and exist outside the social strictures that define the boundaries of marital bonds. Instead of having a religious organization dictate the morality of a relationship, friendships ultimately develop their sense of morality, which is based within the relationship itself.

Ideal/Real

From the moment we are born, we are socialized into a wide range of relationships. Friendship is one of those relationships. We learn about friendship from our families, schools, the media, peers, and others. With each of these different sources of information, we develop an ideal of what "friendship" should be. However, friendships are not ideal; they are real, functioning relationships with pluses and minuses. This dialectic also impacts how we communicate and interact within the friend-

ship itself. If our culture teaches us that people should be reserved and respectful in private, then a simple act of laughing with another person can be an outward sign of friendship.

Interactional Dialectics

It's essential to recognize that friendships evolve over time, along with the way we interact within them. For communication scholars, Rawlins **interactional dialectics** help us understand how communicative behavior happens within friendships.¹³ Rawlins noted four primary communicative dialectics for friendships: independence/dependence, affection/instrumentality, judgment/acceptance, and expressiveness/protectiveness.

Independence/Dependence

Foremost, friendships are voluntary relationships that we choose to have. However, there is a constant pull between the desire to be an independent person and the willingness to depend on one's friends. Let's look at a quick example. It's a Friday afternoon, and you're done with class or work. A movie you've been wanting to see has just come out, so you watch a matinee. You engaged in behavior without thinking of your friend. You acted independently. It's also possible that you know your friend hates going to the movies, so engaging in independent movie-watching behavior is very much in line with the norms you've established within your friendship.

On the other side, we depend on our friendships. You may have a friend with whom you do almost everything, and it reaches the point where people see you as a duo and are surprised when you're not together. In these highly dependent friendships, individual behavior is probably very infrequent and more likely to be resented. Now, if you went to the movie alone in a highly dependent friendship, your friend might be upset or jealous because you didn't wait to see it with them. You may have had the right to engage as an independent person, but a friend in a highly dependent friendship would see this as a violation. This story would cause even more friction within the friendship if you had promised to see the movie with your friend. You would still act independently, but your friend would have a stronger foundation for being upset.

Ultimately, all friendships have to negotiate independence and dependence. As with the establishment of any friendship norm, the pair involved in the relationship needs to decide when it's appropriate to be independent and when it is appropriate to be dependent. Perhaps you need to check in via text 20 times a day (a pretty dependent relationship) or talk on the phone once a year; in both cases, friendships are different and are constantly in negotiation. It's also important to note that a friendship that was once highly dependent can become highly independent and vice versa.

Affection/Instrumentality

The second interaction dialectic examines the intersection of affection as a reason for friendship versus instrumentality (the agency or means by which a person accomplishes their goals or objectives). As Rawlins noted, "This principle formulates the interpenetrated nature of caring for a friend as an end-in-itself and/or as a means to an end."¹⁴ We already discussed the importance of affection in a friendship, but haven't examined the issue of friendships and instrumentality. In friendships, instrumentality helps us understand the following question, "How do we use friendships to

benefit ourselves?” Some people are uncomfortable with this question and find the idea of instrumentality very anti-friendship. Ever had a terrible day, and all you needed was a hug from your best friend? Well, was that hug a sign of affection (maybe), but you used that friendship to get something you wanted/needed. We all do this to varying degrees within friendships. Maybe you don’t have a washer and dryer in your apartment, so you go to your best friend’s place to do laundry. In that situation, you are using your friend and that relationship to achieve a need that you have (wearing clean clothes).

The problem of instrumentality arises when one party feels that they are being used and taken for granted within the friendship itself, or if one friend stops seeing these acts as voluntary and starts seeing them as obligatory. First, sometimes there is an imbalance in friendships, and one friend feels they are being taken advantage of. Perhaps the friend with the washer and dryer realizes that the only time his “friend” really reaches out to see if he’s available to hang out is when the “friend” needs to do laundry. Second, sometimes acts that were initially voluntary become seen as obligatory. In our example, the friend who needs to wash their clothes may view what was once a nice, voluntary gesture as an obligation. If this happens, then the use of the washer and dryer becomes part of the rules of the friendship, which can change the dynamic of the relationship if the person with the washer and dryer isn’t happy about being used in this way.

Judgment/Acceptance

In our friendships, we expect these relationships will enhance our self-esteem and make us feel accepted, cared for, and wanted. Interpersonal relationships of all kinds are marked by judgmental messages. Ronald Liang argued that all interpersonal messages are inherently evaluative.¹⁵ So, how do we navigate the need to be accepted and the reality of being judged? Much of this involves negotiating the friendship itself. Although we may not appreciate receiving criticism from others, Liang argues that criticism demonstrates to another person that we value them enough to offer constructive feedback.¹⁶ Now, can criticism become toxic, yes? Maybe you’ve experienced a friend who criticized everything about you. Perhaps it reached the point where you felt that you needed to change almost everything about how you look, act, think, feel, and behave just to be “good enough” for your friend. If that’s the case, then that friend is clearly not criticizing you for your betterment but for their desires.

Expressiveness/Protectiveness

The final interactional dialectic is expressiveness/protectiveness. This dialectic raises questions about the degree to which we want to express ourselves in our friendships while determining how much we should not express to protect ourselves. As we discussed earlier in this book, social penetration theory starts with the basic idea that in our initial interactions with others we disclose a wide breadth about ourselves. Still, these are primarily surface-level topics (e.g., what’s your major, what are your hobbies, where are you from, etc.). As time goes on, the number of topics we express decreases, but they become more personal (depth). In a friendship relationship, we must navigate this breadth and depth in deciding what to express and what to protect.

Ultimately, this is an issue of vulnerability. When we open ourselves up to people and express those deeper parts of ourselves, there is a significant likelihood that disclosure of these areas could cause greater harm to the self-disclosing individual if the information were to get out. For example, one of our coauthors had a friendship sour after our coauthor's friend started talking to our coauthor's parents about our coauthor's sexual orientation. Our coauthor viewed this as a massive violation of the confidentiality of what had been self-disclosed in their friendship. This friend still speaks to our coauthor's parents 20 years later, but our coauthor hasn't spoken to this former friend after the trust was violated. All friendships are an exploration of what can be expressed and what needs to be protected. We all have some friends that we keep at arm's length because we know we need to protect ourselves, as they tend to be overly chatty or gossipy. We have other friends who get to see the real us as we protect less and less of ourselves in those friendships. No one will ever completely know what's going on in our heads, but deep friendships probably come the closest and also make us the most vulnerable.

Mindfulness Activity



In a 2018 survey of readers, *Mindful* explored the qualities of good friendships, “(38%) was a friend’s propensity for understanding. Next was 29% for trustworthiness, followed by 13% for compassion. Another 15% of the vote was divided between positivity, generosity, sense of humor, and sharing similar interests and passions. Finally, 5% of respondents named other qualities, such as self-awareness and honesty.”¹⁷

For this activity, we encourage you to reflect on how you can cultivate a more mindful approach to your friendships. There are three things you can do to be more mindful in your friendships: be present, try something new, and practice compassion and kindness.¹⁸ Think about your friendships and answer the following questions:

1. When you’re with your friends, are you truly present, or do you let distractions (e.g., your cell phone, personal problems, etc.) impede your interactions?
2. How often do you and your friends do new things, or are you stuck in a rut doing the same activities repeatedly?
3. When you’re with your friends, are you mindfully aware of your attention, intention, and attitude? If not, what can you do to refocus yourself to be more present?

Research Spotlight



In 2025, Olson et al. conducted a study examining how college freshmen's use of communication technologies to maintain friendships affects their social change to college.¹⁹ The researchers surveyed 194 first-year college students at the beginning and end of their first semester, focusing on two key psychological processes: social support and belongingness.

The study revealed a surprising contrast in how technology use affected the adjustment of first-year college students, depending on which friends they communicated with. When first-year college students used communication technologies (texting, phone calls, and instant messaging) to maintain relationships with friends from before college, it provided them with social support but actually hindered their social adjustment to college. The more first-year college students engaged in maintaining these pre-college friendships through technology, the poorer their social adjustment became.

In contrast, using communication technologies to maintain friendships with new college peers enhanced the social adjustment of first-year college students by fostering a sense of belonging in their new environment. "Belongingness mediated the association between friendship maintenance over communication technologies and social adjustment to college," meaning that technology use with college friends helped students feel more connected and accepted in their new setting, which in turn improved their overall social adjustment.²⁰

These findings suggest that while staying connected with hometown friends through technology can provide emotional support, it may also prevent first-year college students from fully investing in their new college social environment. The researchers propose that university staff could utilize these insights to help combat loneliness and enhance programs designed to help first-year college students make new friends on campus.

Key Takeaways

- Rawlins identified five characteristics that define friendships: they are voluntary, personal, equal, mutually involved, and emotionally expressive (affect). Each element contributes to the uniqueness of friendship compared to other interpersonal relationships.
- Communication competence supports friendship development by enabling individuals to navigate social interactions effectively. In contrast, high communication apprehen-

sion limits opportunities for forming and maintaining friendships, often resulting in reduced overall friendship satisfaction.

- Dialectical tensions—such as independence versus dependence or judgment versus acceptance—shape how friendships evolve and function, often requiring constant negotiation between opposing needs.
- Contextual dialectics (e.g., private/public, ideal/real) stem from cultural norms, while interactional dialectics (e.g., expressiveness/protectiveness) arise through ongoing interpersonal interactions. Recognizing these helps us better understand the push-pull nature of friendship communication.
- Being a mindful friend means being present, exploring new experiences with others, and practicing compassion. These strategies foster emotional connections and strengthen friendships.

Exercises

1. Think about one of your current or past friendships. Examine that friendship using Rawlins' five characteristics of friendships: voluntary, personal, equality, involvement, and affect.
2. How has your communication competence or CA impacted your ability to develop friendships? Additionally, what advice would you offer to someone with low communication competence or high communication apprehension on how to form friendships?
3. Think about one of your current or past friendships. Use Rawlins's friendship dialectics to analyze this friendship (both contextual and interactional). After analyzing your friendship, what do these dialectical tensions tell you about this friendship?

Stages and Types of Friendships

Learning Objectives

1. Differentiate among Rawlins' seven stages of friendship development.
2. Categorize friendships into Matthews' three types: independent, discerning, and acquisitive.

3. Compare and contrast the characteristics of healthy and unhealthy friendships.
4. Evaluate friendship experiences using the dimensions of health and enjoyment.
5. Interpret real-life examples of friendship using developmental stages and friendship types.

In Stephen Sondheim and George Furth’s musical *Merrily We Roll Along*, the story follows the careers and friendships of three individuals as they attempt to make it in New York City. One song in the show has always stuck out because of its insightful message about friendship, “[Hey Old Friends](#).” In the musical, three friends, Mary, Charlie, and Frank, get together after not having seen each other for a while. The purpose of the song is to discuss how some friendships can persist even when we aren’t in each other’s lives daily. The 2024 revival of the production starred Lindsay Mendez (Mary Flynn), Jonathan Groff (Franklin Shepard), and Daniel Radcliffe (Charley Kringas). A live taping of the show was released to the public worldwide in movie theaters in the fall of 2025. There is also a more traditional movie in the works, starring Beanie Feldstein (Mary), Paul Mescal (Franklin), and Ben Platt (Charley), slated for release in 2042. The story tells the story of the three friends over 20 years in reverse.

In “[Hey Old Friends](#),” we learn a great deal about this group’s friendship and their enduring desire to be close to one another, navigating the ins and outs of life together. This section of the chapter will examine the stages that friendships go through, the types of friendships we have, and the differences between healthy and unhealthy friendships.

Stages of Friendships

As we’ve already discussed, friendships are not static relationships we’re born with. Instead, these relationships are dynamic, and we grow with them. To help us understand how we ultimately form friendships, William Rawlins broke this process into seven stages of friendship (Figure 10.2).²¹

Role Delimited Interaction

The first stage of friendship is called role-delimited interaction. The basic idea behind this stage is that we all exist in a wide range of roles within our lives, such as shopper, salesperson, patient, driver, student, parent/guardian, spouse, etc. In each of these different roles, we end up interacting with a wide range of different people. For example, imagine you’re just sitting down in a new class in college, and you talk to the stranger sitting next to you named Adilah. Here, you are both interacting within your roles as students. Outside of those roles



Figure 10.2. Stages of Friendship

and that context, you may never meet and may never develop a social relationship with this other person. This does not discount the possibility of random chance encounters with other people. Still, most of our interpersonal relationships (outside of our family) stem from these roles and the communicative contexts they present.

Friendly Relations

In role-delimited interaction, we may decide to transition to the second stage of friendship, characterized by friendly relations. These relations are positive interactions, but they still exist within the same roles. In our example, we start chatting with Adilah before each class begins. Though, most of our interactions are still going to be within those roles, so we end up talking about the class, fellow students, the teacher, homework assignments, etc. Notice that there is not a lot of actual self-disclosure happening within friendly relations. Some people can maintain friendly relations with others for years. For example, you may interact with coworkers, members of a religious association, or neighbors within this type of relationship without them ever progressing to the next stage of friendship. According to Rawlins, friendly relationships move toward friendships because they exhibit four specific communication behaviors:

1. moves away from what is required in the specific role relationship,
2. fewer lines and less stereotyped interaction,
3. individual violations of public propriety, and
4. greater spontaneity.²²

First, we interact in a manner that doesn't resemble the original roles we had. In our example, we interact in a manner that doesn't resemble the roles of students when they first meet. Second, we move away from lines of communication that are stereotypes for our roles. For example, some possible stereotyped lines for two students could include, "What did you think of the homework?" "Did you bring your book with you today?" "See you next class," etc. In each of these lines, we enact dialogue that is expected (or stereotyped) within the context of the class itself. Third, more of our normal selves will start to seep into our interactions, which are often referred to as violations of public propriety. Maybe one day Adilah turns to you before class, saying, "That reading for homework was such a waste of time." Here, Adilah is giving you a bit more insight into who she is as a person "These violations of public propriety single an individual out as having an essential side which is not so easily circumscribed by the protocol of a situation."²³ Last, we see increased spontaneity in our interactions with the other person. Over time, these interactions, although still interacting within their formal roles, take on more social and less formalized tones. Perhaps one day Adilah will tell you a joke or share a piece of gossip she's heard. Here, Adilah is being more spontaneous and less structured in her interactions with us.

Moves-Toward-Friendship

At some point, people decide to interact with one another beyond the roles they initially assumed when they first met. This change in roles is voluntary. In our example, Adilah might invite you to get coffee after class one day, and then you ask her to get lunch before class the next day. Although it's possible that a single step outside of those roles could be enough for a friendly relation to move

toward a friendship, there is a sequence of these occurrences. In our example, Adilah may have made the first move by inviting us to coffee, but we reciprocated later by asking her to lunch. In both of these cases, we are starting to step outside of the original friendly relation and changing the nature of our original interactions.

Nascent Friendship

When one enters into the nascent stage of friendship, the friends are no longer interacting within their original roles, and their interactions do not follow the stereotypes associated with those roles. Eventually, we develop norms for how we communicate with this other person that is beyond those original roles and stereotypes. Ultimately, this stage is all about developing those norms. We develop norms for what we discuss, when we discuss it, and how we discuss it. Maybe Adilah clarifies that she doesn't want to talk about politics or religion, and we're perfectly OK with that. Maybe we keep the bulk of our interaction before and after class, or we start having lunch together before class or coffee after class. The norms will differ from one friendship to another, but these norms allow us to establish parameters for the relationship in this early stage. These norms are also important because keeping them demonstrates we can be trusted. And when we show we can be trusted over time, the level of intimacy we can develop within our relationship also increases.

It's also during this period that others see you more and more as a pair of friends, so other; external forces may begin to impact the development of your friendship as well. In our case, perhaps Adilah has a sister who also attends the school, so she starts hanging out with both of you from time to time. Maybe we have a significant other, and they start hanging out as well. Even though we may have these distractions, we must keep faithful to the original friendship. For example, if we start spending more time with Adilah's sister than Adilah, then we aren't faithful to the original friendship. Last, our friendship crystallizes, and others see you as a pair. One of our coauthors had a friend in graduate school, and it was very common for people to ask the friend when our coauthor couldn't be found or to ask the coauthor when the friend couldn't be found. You are seen increasingly as a "duo."

Stabilized Friendship

Ultimately, nascent friendships evolve into stabilized friendships through time and refinement. It's not like one day you wake up and go, "My friendship has stabilized!" It's much more gradual than that. We reach a point where our developed norms and interaction patterns for the friendship are functioning optimally for both parties, and the friendship works smoothly. In nascent friendships, the focus is on the duo and developing the friendship. In stabilization, we often bring in new friends. For example, if we had found out that Adilah had coffee with another person from our class during the nascent stage of friendship, we may have felt a bit hurt or jealous by this "outsider" intruding on our growing friendship." As stabilized friends, we realize that Adilah having coffee with someone else isn't going to impact the strength of the relationship we already have. If anything, maybe Adilah will find other friends to grow the friendship circle. However, like any relationship, both parties still must attempt to make the friendship work. We need to reaffirm our friendships, spend time with our friends, and maintain the balance of equity we discussed earlier in this chapter.

Rawlins also notes that friendships in the stabilized stage can represent three different basic patterns: active, dormant, and commemorative.²⁴ **Active friendships** are ones where there is a negotiated sense of mutual accessibility and availability for both parties in the friendship. **Dormant friendships** “share either a valued history or a sufficient amount of sustained contact to expect or remain eligible for a resumption of the friendship at any time.”²⁵ These friends may not be ones we interact with every day, but they are still very much alive and could take on new meaning and grow back into an active friendship if the time arises. And **commemorative friendships** are ones that reflect a specific space and time in our lives. Still, current interaction is minimal and primarily reflects a time when the two friends were highly involved in each other’s lives. With commemorative friendships, we still consider ourselves friends, even though we don’t have the consistent interaction that active friendships typically involve.

In a study conducted by Sara LaBelle and Scott Myers, the researchers aimed to determine the types of relational maintenance strategies people use to sustain their friendships across three different friendship patterns (active, dormant, & commemorative).²⁶ Using the seven relational maintenance behaviors noted by Laura Stafford (positivity, understanding, self-disclosure, relationship talks, assurances, tasks, & networks),²⁷ The researchers recruited participants over the age of 30 to examine the intersection of relational maintenance and friendship types. All three friendship types positivity, relational talks, and networks related to relational maintenance to some degree. However, active friendships were more likely to use understanding, self-disclosure, assurances, and tasks to maintain their friendships than commemorative friendships. No differences were seen in relational maintenance strategies between active and dormant friendships nor dormant friendships and commemorative friendships.

Waning Friendship

Unfortunately, some friendships will not last. There are many reasons friendships may wane or decrease in importance in our lives. There are three primary reasons Rawlins discusses why this happens: “an overall decline in affect, an individual or mutual decision to let it wane based on identifiable dissatisfaction with the relationship, or a significant, negative, relational event which precipitates an abrupt termination of the friendship.”²⁸ First, some relationships wane because there is a decrease in emotional attachment. Some friends stop putting in the time and effort to maintain the friendship, so it’s not surprising that there’s a decrease in emotional attachment. Second, both parties may become dissatisfied with the relationship and decide to take a hiatus or spend more time with other friends. Last, something could happen, a relationship-destroying event. You find out that Adilah had an affair with your romantic partner. Adilah broke a promise to you or told someone one of your secrets. Adilah started yelling at you for no reason and physically assaulted you.

There is a wide range of discrete events that could end a friendship. In a study conducted by a team of researchers led by Amy Janan Johnson, the researchers interviewed college students about why their friendships had terminated.²⁹³⁰ The most common reasons listed for why relationships fell apart were 1) romantic partner of self or friend, 2) increase in geographic distance, 3) conflict, 4) not many common interests, 5) hanging out with different groups or different friends, and 5) other. Now, females and males in the study did report differences in the likelihood that these five reasons

led to deterioration. Females reported that conflict was a greater reason for the decline of friendships than males. Males reported that not having many common interests was a greater reason for friendship deterioration than it was for females. Females and males did not differ in the other three categories. It's essential to note that, although this set of findings is interesting, it was conducted with college students, so its applicability to older adults may be limited.

Post-Friendship

The final stage of the friendship is what happens after the friendship is over. Even if a friendship ended on a horrible note, there are still parts of that friendship that will remain with us forever. That friendship will impact how we interact with friends and perceive friendships forever. You may even have symbolic links to your friends: the nightclubs you went to, the courses you took together, the coffee shops you frequented, the movies you watched, etc.... all are links back to that friendship. It's also possible that the friendship ended on a positive note and you still periodically say hello on Facebook or during the holidays through card exchanges. Just as all friendships are unique, so are their experiences of post-friendship reality.

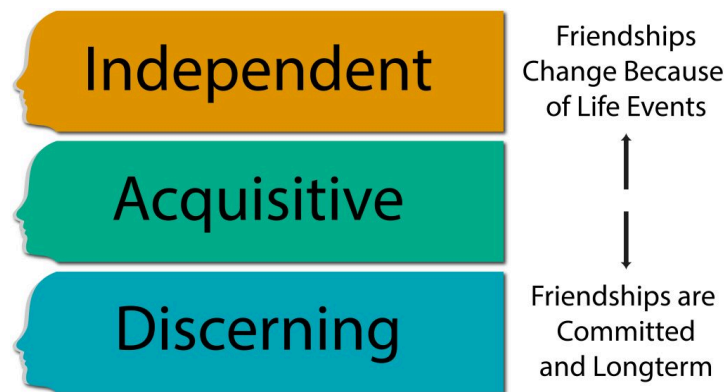


Figure 10.3 Friendship Styles

Friendship Styles

Beyond the stages of friendship development, different people form various types of friendships throughout their lifetime. Sarah H. Matthews ultimately noted there were three basic types of friendships that people have: independent, discerning, and acquisitive (as seen in Figure 10.3).³¹

Independent

In her study, Matthews found that independents often saw their friendships based on specific circumstances in their lives and not necessarily by specific friends. When talking about friends, independents were more likely to about “people they knew” or “people they had known,” not reflecting on specific names. Independents were more likely to mention specific names when discussing people they were currently interacting with. For example, independents discussed friends during particular periods of their lives (e.g., elementary school, junior high/middle school, high school, college) rather than specific individuals they knew for extended periods. Matthews argues that independents

frame their concepts of friendship in relation to significant life events. They also never reported having a close, special, or best friend relationships, so during periods of major life events, they didn't have specific commitments to the people they called "friends." Independents were also more likely to discuss friends as a general concept rather than particular friends. Comparing independents to the stages of friendship discussed by Rawlins, you can consider these to be more along the lines of "friendly relations." Matthews chose the term "independents" because it reflects a more autonomous state. "It was clear that most of them were not isolated people, but instead considered themselves to be sufficient unto themselves."³²

Discerning

The second type of friendship discussed by Matthews was the discerning style, which, unlike the independent style, is marked by a deep connection with a friend or group of friends, regardless of changing circumstances in their lives. These friendships are characterized by a deep commitment and longevity, which also means that when a discerning person loses a friend, they are most likely to experience a profound sense of loss in their life. Discerners were also more likely to draw clear lines between friendly relations and friendship. Overall, "the discerning identified ... only a very few people throughout their lives whom they considered friends. Although not all of these informants had kept these friendships, those who had, valued them highly."³³

Acquisitive

The final friendship style discussed by Matthews is the acquisitive style. Acquisitives are "people who moved through their lives collecting a variety of friendships, allowing circumstances to make possible the meeting of likely candidates, but then, committing themselves to the friendships once they were made, at the very least for the period of time during which they and their friends were geographically proximate."³⁴ Unlike the independents, acquisitives discussed having close connections with all of the friends they've met, and unlike the discerning, acquisitives were open to developing new friendships throughout their lives. These individuals develop a strong core group of friends as they go throughout their lives while acquiring new ones depending on changes within their lives.

Good and Bad Friendships

Another system for understanding friendships is to think of them regarding two basic psychological constructs: health and enjoyment. First, is the relationship a healthy one for you to have? Although this is a concept that is more commonly discussed in romantic relationships, friendships can also be healthy or unhealthy (Table 10.2).

Table 10.2 Healthy vs. Unhealthy Friendships

Healthy	Unhealthy
Mutual respect	Contempt

Healthy	Unhealthy
Trust	Suspicion
Honesty	Untruthful
Support	Hinder
Fairness/Equality	Unjust/Inequity
Separate Identities	Intertwined Identities
Open Communication	Closed Communication
Playfulness/Fondness	Sober/Animus
Self-Esteem Enhancing	Self-Esteem Destroying
Fulfilling	Depressing
Acceptance	Combative
Affectionate/Loving	Cold/Indifferent
Comforting	Stressful
Genuine/Benevolent	Manipulative/Exploitive
Beneficial	Damaging
Healthful	Toxic

Besides the health of a friendship, you must also question whether the friendship is something that ultimately brings you enjoyment as a person. Does this friendship give you meaning of some kind? Ultimately, we can categorize these experiences into four distinct types of friendships (Figure 10.4).

Research Spotlight



Online Friendships can be Beneficial

Lindsay E. Young conducted a study to explore online friendships of black sexual minority men.³⁵ Young was interested in determining whether Black sexual minority men (BSMM) engaged in safer sex communication and behaviors if friends on Facebook also engaged in safer sex communication and behaviors.

Young proposed a research question and hypothesis to conduct her study.

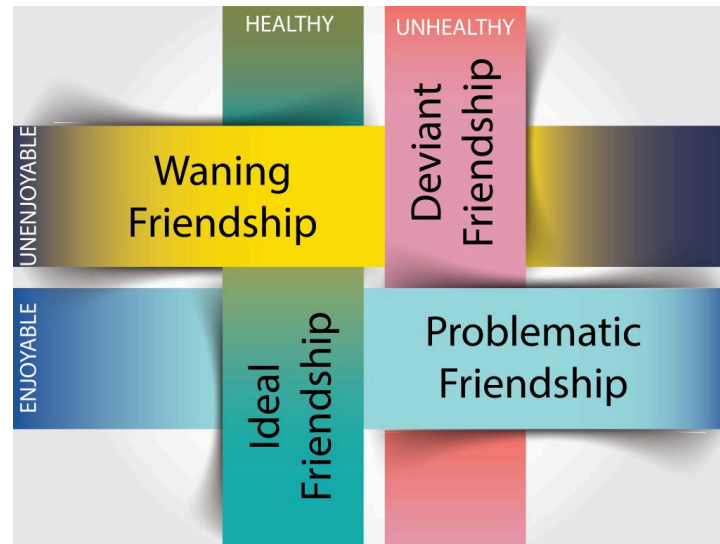


Figure 10.4. Four Types of Friendships

RQ1: Is an individual's masspersonal safer sex communication associated with their personal safer sex behavior?

H1: An individual's safer sex behavior is more similar to the safer sex behavior of their online friends, compared with nonfriends.

H2: An individual's safer sex behavior is positively associated with the masspersonal safer sex communication of their online friends.

H3: An individual's masspersonal safer sex communication is more similar to the masspersonal safer sex communication of the online friends, compared with nonfriends.

H4: An individual's masspersonal safer sex communication is positively associated with the safer sex behavior of their online friends.

The results of this study were interesting! Hypotheses 1-3 were confirmed, but not Hypothesis 4.

BSMM's individual safer sex communication was not related to their safe sex behavior. Regardless of what they were saying, it had nothing to do with that they were doing.

Individual safe sex communication was related to peer safe sex communication, but not safe sex behavior.

Safe sex behavior was related to peer safe sex behavior and peer safe sex communication.

What does this mean?

The author defined safe sex behavior in this study as condom use and proposed that this may be a weakness in the study design. It is possible that a broader definition of safe sex

behavior may have resulted in finding a relationship between individual safe sex communication and safe sex behavior.

Additionally, the author asserts that BSMM's safe sex communication and safe sex behavior may not have been related in the current study because the BSMMs were presenting an idealized self in the public setting rather than communicating accurately.

The author proposes that peer communication about safe sex helps individuals understand "norms" and this, in turn, impact the individual's expectation about how to behave when engaging in sex.

The author asserts that the positive relationship between peer communication about safe sex and individual communication about safe sex can be attributed to confidence. If individuals see others talking about safe sex practices then the individuals will feel more comfortable (confident) engaging in the same conversation.

Overall, the study is an excellent demonstration that online friend communication can positively influence communication and behavior. Masspersonal communication can be used to help introduce positive norms to target audience.

Ideal Friendship

The first category we label as "ideal friends" because these relationships are both healthy and enjoyable. In an ideal world, most our relationships would fall into the category of ideal friendships.

Waning Friendship

The second category we label as "waning friendship" because these friendships are still healthy but not enjoyable anymore. Chances are, this friendship was once ideal and has become less enjoyable over time. There are a wide range of reasons why friendships may stop being enjoyable. It's possible that you no longer have the time to invest in the friendship, so you find yourself regretting the amount of time and energy that's necessary to keep the friendship afloat.

Problematic Friendship

The third category of friendship, which we classify as problematic friendships, is tricky because these are enjoyable, but they are not healthy for us. Ultimately, the friend we have could be a lot of fun to hang out with, but they could also be more damaging to us as individuals. Instead of supporting us, they make fun of us. Instead of treating us as equals, they hold all the power in the relationship. Instead of being honest, we always know they're lying to us. Ultimately, we must question why we decide to stay in these relationships.

Deviant Friendship

The last category of friendships we may have is deviant friendships, more commonly referred to as toxic friendships. For our purposes here, we use the term “deviant” because it refers to any behavior that deviates from established behavioral norms. In this case, any friendship situation that is clearly outside the parameters of what is a healthy and enjoyable friendship is not the norm. Unfortunately, sometimes people become so entrenched in these friendships that they stop realizing they’re not normal at all. Others may think that their deviant friendships are the only kinds of friendships they can get and/or deserve. It’s entirely possible that a deviant friendship started as perfectly healthy and normal, but often these were somewhat problematic in their early stages and eventually progressed into fully deviant friendships.

Deviant Friends:

- Use criticism and insults as weapons.
- Use guilt to get you to cave-in to their desires and whims.
- Immediately assume you’re lying (probably because they are).
- Disclose your personal secrets.
- Are very gossipy about others, and are probably gossipy about you as well.
- Only care about their own desires and needs.
- Use your emotions as weapons to attack you psychologically.
- Pass judgment on you and your ideas based on their own with little flexibility.
- Are stuck up and only really turn to you when they need you.
- Can be obsessively needy, but then are very hard to please.
- Are inconsistent, so predicting how they will think or behave can be very hard if not impossible.
- Put you in competition with their other friends for affection and attention.
- Conversations tend to be all about them and their desires and needs.
- Make you feel that being your friend is a chore for them.
- Make you feel as if you’ve lost control over your own life and choices.
- Cross major relationship boundaries and violate relationship norms without apology.
- Express their jealousy of your other friendships and relationships.

Research Spotlight



In 2024, Natalie Pennington, Jeffrey A. Hall, and Amanda J. Holmstrom published a report on the “American Friendship Project” (AFP), a comprehensive research initiative aimed at providing the most accurate and complete account of friendship in the United States, including its health and changes over time.³⁶

Their findings suggest that common concerns about widespread friendlessness may be overstated, as very few Americans (less

than 3%) reported having no friends at all. While Americans, on average, reported having four or five friends, the study also showed that this number could be higher, especially when survey methods allowed for broader reporting. Friendships often include family members and romantic partners, highlighting a broad understanding of who counts as a friend. Communication with friends primarily occurs through in-person meetings, voice calls, and text messaging, with the majority engaging with these channels on a monthly basis. Although over 75% of Americans expressed satisfaction with the number of friends they had and felt their friends celebrated their good news, a significant portion (over 40%) desired greater closeness and more time with their friends. College students, in particular, reported higher rates of losing touch with friends compared to adults; however, for many across the samples, the COVID-19 pandemic also strengthened existing friendships. Overall, the AFP presents a positive portrayal of American friendships, while also highlighting a collective yearning for deeper connections.

Key Takeaways

- Rawlins proposed that friendships develop through seven distinct stages, each marked by increasing personal investment and social intimacy. The first stage, role-delimited interaction, involves interacting within assigned social roles (e.g., classmate, coworker). In the second stage, friendly relations, individuals begin to experience repeated positive interactions but still primarily stay within their formal roles. The third stage, moves-toward-friendship, occurs when individuals intentionally engage with one another outside of their original roles. The fourth stage, nascent friendship, reflects the establishment of shared norms and boundaries unique to the friendship. The fifth stage, stabilized friendship, is marked by mutual trust, consistency, and the ability to maintain the friendship despite outside relationships. The sixth stage, waning friendship, involves a decline in emotional connection or commitment, often because of dissatisfaction or a major rupture in the relationship. Finally, post-friendship refers to the period after a friendship has ended, when the memories and symbols of that connection may still influence the individuals involved.
- Sarah H. Matthews identified three basic friendship styles across the life course:
 - Independent individuals form friendships based on circumstances rather than deep bonds, rarely naming specific friends and often moving through life without a “best friend” figure.
 - Discerning individuals cultivate a few long-term, emotionally rich friendships and draw clear distinctions between friends and acquaintances.

- Acquisitive individuals maintain a stable group of close friends while remaining open to forming new friendships as life circumstances change, striking a balance between depth and flexibility.
- Understanding the difference between healthy and unhealthy friendships helps individuals assess the value of their current relationships. Healthy friendships are characterized by mutual respect, trust, support, and open communication. In contrast, unhealthy friendships often involve manipulation, criticism, inequality, or emotional harm. Friendships also fluctuate in healthiness over time, necessitating ongoing attention to boundaries and behavior.
- Friendships can also be understood by examining their health (e.g., whether the relationship supports well-being) and enjoyment (e.g., whether the relationship is personally fulfilling). These two dimensions create four categories of friendship experiences:
 - Ideal friendships are both healthy and enjoyable, offering support, trust, and mutual satisfaction.
 - Waning friendships remain healthy but are no longer enjoyable, often because of shifting priorities or reduced time investment.
 - Problematic friendships can be enjoyable but are often unhealthy, involving behaviors that are emotionally harmful or manipulative, despite the fun.
 - Deviant friendships are neither healthy nor enjoyable and often include toxic behaviors such as manipulation, disrespect, or emotional abuse.
- Understanding these developmental stages, types, and quality indicators can help individuals navigate, maintain, or step away from friendships based on their current needs and relational goals.

Exercises

1. Reflect on a friendship that you no longer have. Take that friendship through all seven of Rawlins' friendship stages. How did you decide when the friendship entered a new stage?
2. Think about your patterns of friendship in your life. Based on the information you learned from Matthews, what type of friendship style do you have? What made you decide that this friendship style most accurately reflects your approach to friendships?
3. Thinking about the intersection of healthy friendships and enjoyability, think of one friendship from your own life (past or present) that fits into each category. After forming four friendships, differentiate among the four friendships and their outcomes.

Friendships in Different Contexts

Learning Objectives

1. Differentiate between same-sex and opposite-sex friendships.
2. Evaluate J. Donald O'Meara's five distinct challenges that cross-sex relationships have.
3. Define and explain the term "postmodern friendship."
4. Appraise the importance of cross-group friendships.
5. Interpret the impact that mediated technologies have on friendships.

So far in this chapter, we've explored the foundational building blocks for understanding friendships. We will now examine friendships from several different perspectives: gender and friendships, cross-group friendships, and mediated friendships.

Gender and Friendships

From a highly traditional perspective on the notion of same and opposite-sex friendships, researchers compared notions of communal and **agentic friendships**. **Communal friendships** were marked by intimacy, personal/emotional expressiveness, amount of self-disclosure, quality of self-disclosure, confiding, and emotional supportiveness.³⁷ Agentic friendships were centered on activity. If you look at Figure 10.5, you'll see three curves associated with these concepts. The first one shows women being communal and men being agentic in their friendships, which was a common perspective about gender differences and friendships. In reality, research has demonstrated that both males and females can have communal relationships, even though women report notably higher levels of communality in their friendships (second set of curves). As for agency, women and men were found to both have agentic friendships, and there was considerable overlap between the two groups here, with men being slightly more agentic (seen in the third set of curves).

A considerable amount of research on friendship has focused on sex differences between males and females. In this section, we're going to start by looking at some of the research specifics to same-sex friends and then opposite-sex friendships. We'll conclude this section by discussing an alternative perspective on these types of relationships.

Same-Sex Friendships

For a lot of research, we use the term "same sex" to refer to two individuals of the same biological sex as friends. Gerald Phillips and Julia Wood argue that there are four primary reasons females develop friendships with the same sex: activities, personal support, problem-solving, and reciprocation.³⁸ However, these four categories are different, whether looking at female or male friend-

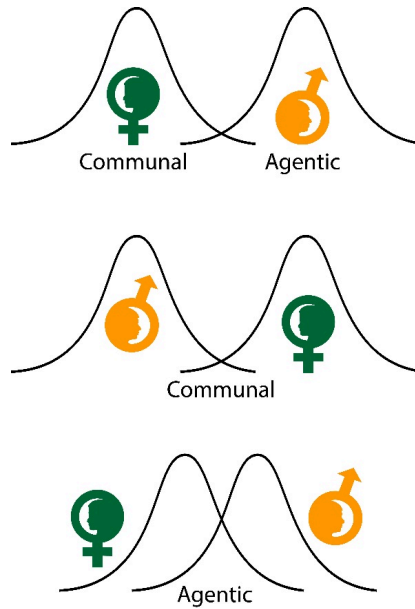


Figure 10.5. Communal vs. Agentic Friendships

ships. For female same-sex friendships, the first reason is activity. These are friendships that develop around a specific activity: working out, church, social clubs, etc. Mostly, these friendships remain confined to the activity itself, providing an opportunity for conversation and noncommittal associations. The second reason is personal support. It's this second category that many highlight when discussing the differences between female and male friendships. Personal support involves friendships where an individual has a personal confidant with whom they can share their deepest, darkest secrets, concerns, needs, and desires. These friendships are often highly stable and last for a considerable amount of time. By nature, these friendships are highly communal, which is why we discuss them as a key reason for female same-sex friendships. Third, we all have areas where we excel and areas where we need improvement. We often form friendships with people who possess skills that complement our own. Consciously or subconsciously, we develop friendships with others as a means to solve problems in our daily lives. For example, an information technology specialist may become friends with an accountant. In their friendship, they provide complementary support: computer help and financial advice. Finally, females view their friendships as highly reciprocal. They expect to get out of a friendship what they put into a friendship; it's a mutual exchange. If a female feels her friend is not putting into a relationship the same amount of time and energy, she is less likely to keep sustaining that friendship.

As for male-male friendships, research shows that they're not drastically different, although their dynamics may be framed differently. They still form friendships through recreation, personal support, problem-solving, and reciprocation. And these relationships can be just as intimate as those of their female counterparts, but they may appear a bit more distinct. First, many male friendships are centered around activities, such as church, work, hobbies, and social clubs. These friendships are less about having conversations and more about engaging in the activity at hand. These friendships are unlikely to be as communal as female friendships that develop around shared recreational activities. Often, people mistake these male friendships as being less "intimate" because they do not disclose

a lot of information, and there isn't necessarily a lot of talk involved. Still, males do find these relationships perfectly fulfilling.

Phillips and Woods noted that men often view friendships in terms of teams; you have allies and team members. They create tight-knit circles of in- and out-group members based on their "team" status. Part of this team status involves performing favors for one another and siding with them. It's the whole "I've got your back" mentality. We should also note that males are more likely to be friends who are the most like them: similar majors, similar religious, similar rungs of the social hierarchy, similar socioeconomic status, similar attitudes, similar interests, etc.... Research has even shown that males are more likely to have male friends who are equally physically attractive.³⁹ One explanation for this phenomenon is that males are more likely to develop relationships based on social hierarchies. If attractive males are on a higher rung of a social hierarchy, then it's not surprising that the matching effect occurs.⁴⁰

Opposite-Sex Friendships

"Friendship between a woman and a man? For many people, the idea is charming but improbable."⁴¹ William Rawlins originally wrote this sentence in 1993 at the start of a chapter about the problems associated with opposite-sex or cross-sex friendships. What do you think? J. Donald O'Meara discusses five distinct challenges that cross-sex relationships have: emotional bond, sexuality, inequality and power, public relationships, and opportunity structure.^{42 43}

Emotional Bond

Foremost, in Western society, females and males are raised to see the opposite sex as potential romantic partners and not friends. One of the inherent problems with cross-sex friendships is that one of the friends may misinterpret the friendship as romantic. From an emotional sense, the question that must be answered is, "How do friends develop a deeply emotional or even loving relationship with someone of the opposite sex?" Unfortunately, females are more likely to think this is possible than males. William Rawlins attempted to differentiate between five distinct love styles that could help distinguish the types of emotional bonds possible: friendship, Platonic love, companionate love, physical love, and romantic love.⁴⁴ First, friendship is "a voluntary, mutual, personal and affectionate relationship devoid of expressed sexuality."⁴⁵ Second, Platonic love is an even deeper sense of intimacy and emotional commitment without sexual activity. Third, is the interplay between friendship and love, which is often found in friendships and sexual relationships. It's often characterized by the use of the terms "boyfriend" and "girlfriend" as distinguishing characteristics to denote paired romantic attachments. Fourth, physical love involves high levels of sexual intimacy with love levels of relationship commitment. And finally, there's romantic love, a relationship marked by exclusivity in terms of emotional attachment and sexual activity. O'Meara correctly surmises that the challenge for cross-sex friendships is finding that shared sense of love without one partner slipping into one of the other four categories of love because often the emotions associated with all five different types of love can be perceived similarly.

Sexuality

The obvious next step in the progression of issues related to cross-sex friendships is sexuality. Inherent in any cross-sex friendship between heterosexual couples is sexual attraction. Sexual attraction may not be the initial thing in a relationship. Still, it could develop further down the line and start to blur the lines between someone's desire for friendship and a sexual relationship. In any cross-sex friendship, there will always be a latent or manifested sexual attraction that is possible. Even if one party involved in the friendship is completely unattracted to the other person, it doesn't mean that the other friend isn't sexually attracted. As such, like it or not, there will always be sexuality in cross-sex friendships once people hit puberty. Now, it's perfectly possible that both parties within a friendship are mutually sexually attracted to each other and decide openly not to explore that path. You can find someone sexually attractive and not see them as a viable sexual or romantic partner. For example, maybe you both decide not to consider each other viable sexual or romantic partners because you're already in healthy romantic relationships, or you may realize that your friendship is more important.

Research Spotlight



In 2020, Sara L. Trask, Haley Kranstuber Horstman, and Colin Hesse examined how two types of deceptive affection—intensified affection and withheld affection—impact relational health in different types of relationships: romantic relationships (RRs), cross-sex friendships (CSFs), and friends with benefits relationships (FWBRs).⁴⁶ Intensified affection occurs when someone expresses more fondness than they feel, while withheld affection involves suppressing affectionate feelings. The study involved 526 college

students.

The researchers found significant differences in how deceptive affection is used across these relational contexts. Friends with benefits relationships (FWBRs) experienced both intensified and withheld affection the most. Specifically, FWBRs and CSFs withheld affection more than RRs. This might be because individuals in FWBRs and CSFs often navigate relationship uncertainty or unreciprocated feelings, leading them to suppress their true emotions to avoid vulnerability or embarrassment. FWBRs also used more intensified affection than RRs and CSFs. This intensified affection in FWBRs may be used primarily to initiate sexual activity, aligning with previous research suggesting insincere affection can be expressed for sexual goals.

Regarding relational health outcomes (which included relational satisfaction, closeness, and commitment), intensified affection was positively related to relational health in romantic relationships (RRs). This suggests that in RRs, exaggerating positive feelings may contribute

to a healthier perception of the relationship, possibly as a form of “deep acting,” where individuals consciously modify their emotions for the relationship’s benefit. Similarly, withheld affection also positively predicted relational health in RRs. This finding expands previous research by suggesting that withholding affection can contribute to a positive perception of the relationship in RRs, potentially when done to protect a partner or maintain relational harmony.

However, for friends with benefits relationships (FWBRs), the dynamic was different: withheld affection negatively predicted relational health outcomes. This means that when individuals in FWBRs suppressed their affectionate feelings, they reported lower satisfaction, closeness, and commitment in their relationships. This negative impact is likely because of the inherent lack of emotional intimacy and commitment in FWBRs; suppressing romantic feelings in these contexts can lead to negative personal outcomes for the FWB partners. The study also found that withheld affection was a stronger predictor of relational health in FWBRs than in RRs and CSFs. This could be because in RRs and CSFs, withholding affection might be seen as a protective measure for the partner. In contrast, in FWBRs, it might be more about self-preservation, leading to feelings of pressure or guilt that negatively impact relational health. These findings highlight that deceptive affection, particularly withheld affection, does not uniformly benefit relationships and its consequences depend heavily on the type of relationship.

Inequality and Power

We live in a society where men and women are not treated equally. As such, there will always be a fact of inequality and power imbalance between people in cross-sex friendships created by our society. As such, males are in a better position to be in an exchange relationship. O’Meara argues that cross-sex friendships should, therefore, avoid exchange friendships and develop communal ones instead. However, there is also an imbalance that may exist in terms of communal needs. Females are more likely to get their emotional needs met through same-sex friendships. However, males are also more likely to have their emotional needs met through friendships with the opposite sex. This dependence on the opposite sex for emotional needs and support places females in a subordinate position of needing to fulfill those needs.

Public Relationships

The next challenge for cross-sex friendships involves the public side of friendships. The previous three challenges focused on the private, inner workings of the friendship between a female and a male (internal side). This challenge is focused on public displays of cross-sex friendships. First, others may see a cross-sex friendship as a romantic relationship. Although not a horrible thing, this could give others the impression that a pair of friends are not available for romantic relationships. Or if one of the friends is seen on a date, it is clear that they are cheating on their significant other.

Second, it's possible that others won't believe the couple as "simply being friends." This consistent devaluing of cross-sex friendships and the favoring of cross-sex romantic relationships in our society puts a lot of stress on cross-sex friendships. This devaluation of friendships over romantic relationships can also be seen as a tool to delegitimize cross-sex friendships. Third, others may question the sexual orientation of the individual's involvement in the opposite-sex friendship. If a male is in a friendship relationship with a female, he may be labeled as gay or bisexual for not turning that cross-sex friendship into a romantic one. The opposite is also true. Last, public cross-sex friendships can cause problems for cross-sex romantic partners. Although not always the case, it may be very difficult for one member of a romantic relationship to conceive that their partner is in a close friendship relationship with the opposite sex that is not romantic or sexual. For individuals who have never experienced these types of emotional connections, they may assume that it is impossible and that the cross-sex friends are just "kidding themselves." Another problem for romantic relationships is that the significant other becomes jealous of the cross-sex friend because they believe that, as the significant other, they should fulfill any role a cross-sex friend is.

Opportunity Structure

The final challenge described by O'Meara was not part of the original four but was described in a subsequent article.⁴⁷ This question is primarily focused on how individuals find opportunities to develop cross-sex friendships. Many aspects of our social lives are divided by gender, with females and males often treated differently. Girls go to Girl Scouts and Boys to Boy Scouts. Girls play volleyball and softball while boys play football and baseball. Now, that's not to say that there aren't girls who play football or boys who play volleyball, but most of these sports are still highly sex-segregated. As such, when we're growing up, we are more likely to spend social time with the same sex. Ultimately, cross-sex relationships can develop, but our society is not structured for these to happen naturally in many ways.

Postmodern Friendships

In the previous section, we looked at some of the basic issues of same-sex and cross-sex friendships; however, a great deal of this line of thinking has been biased by heteronormative patterns of understanding.⁴⁸ The noted absence of LGBTQIA individuals from a lot of the friendship literature is nothing new.⁴⁹ However, we have needed newer theoretical lenses to help us break free of some of these historical understandings of friendship. "Growing out of poststructuralism, feminism, and gay and lesbian studies, queer theory has been favored by those scholars for whom the heteronormative aspects of everyday life are troubling, in how they condition and govern the possibilities for individuals to build meaningful identities and selves."⁵⁰ By taking a purely heteronormative stance at understanding friendships, friendships scholars built a field around basic assumptions about gender and the nature of gender.⁵¹

Friendship scholar Michael Monsour asked a group of friendship scholars about the definition of "friendship" and found there was little to no consensus. How then, Monsour argues, can researchers be as clear in their attempts to define "gender" and "sex" when analyzing same-sex or opposite-sex

friendships.⁵² As part of his discussion questioning the nature of gender and sex and how it's been used by friendship scholars, Monsour provided the following questions for us to consider:

- What does it mean to state that two individuals are in a same-sex or opposite-sex friendship and/or that they are of the same or opposite sex from one another?
- What decision rules are invoked when deciding whether a particular friendship is one or the other?
- Why must the friendship be one or the other?
- If friendship scholars and researchers believe that all friendships are either same-sex or opposite-sex (and it appears that most do), at a minimum there should be agreement about what constitutes biological sex. What biological traits make a person a female or a male?
- Are they absolute?
- Are they universal?⁵³
- As part of this discussion, Monsour provides an extensive list of areas of controversy related to the terms used for binary gender identity.
- What about individuals who are intersexed?
- What about individuals with chromosomal differences outside of traditional XX and XY (e.g., X, Y, XYY, XXX, XXY, etc.)? Heck, there are even some XX_{males} and XY_{females} who develop because of chromosomal structural anomalies SRY region on the Y chromosome.
- What about bisexual, gay, and lesbian people?
- What about people who are transgendered or transsexual?
- What about people who are asexual?

Hopefully, you're seeing that the concept of ascribing same-sex and opposite-sex friendships simply based on 46-chromosomal pairs of either XX or XY who are cisgendered and heterosexual may not be the best or most complete way of understanding friendships.

We should also note that research in communication has noted that an individual's biological sex contributes to maybe 1% of the differences between "females" and "males."⁵⁴ So, why would we use the words "same" and "opposite" to differentiate friendship lines when there is more similarity between groups than not? As such, we agree with the definition and conceptualization of the term created by Mike Monsour and William Rawlins' "postmodern friendships."⁵⁵ A **postmodern friendship** is one where the "participants co-construct the individual and dyadic realities within specific friendships. This co-construction involves negotiating and affirming (or not) identities and intersubjectively creating relational and personal realities through communication."⁵⁶ Ultimately, this perspective allows individuals to create their own friendship identities that may or may not be based on any sense of traditional gender identities.

Cross-Group Friendships

As we noted above, research has found that one of the biggest factors in friendship creation is the groups one belongs to (more so for males than females). In this section, we will explore issues related to cross-group friendships. A **cross-group friendship** is a friendship that exists between two individuals who belong to two or more different cultural groups (e.g., ethnicity, race, sexual orientation,

socioeconomic status, nationality, etc.). “The phrase, ‘Some of my best friends are...’ is all too typically used by individuals wanting to demonstrate their liberal credentials. ‘Some of my best friends are... gay.’ ‘Some of my best friends are... Black.’ People say, ‘Some of my best friends are...’ and then fill in the blank with whatever marginalized group which they care to exonerate themselves.”⁵⁷ Often, when we hear people make these “Some of my best friends are...” statements, we view them as seriously suspect and question the validity of these relationships as actual “friendships.” However, many people develop successful cross-group friendships.

It’s essential to recognize that our cultural identities can also influence how we perceive ourselves as part of the “in-group” or the “out-group”. Identity in our society is often highly intertwined with marginalization. As noted earlier, we also know that males are more likely to align themselves with others they perceive as similar. Females do this as well, but not to the same degree as males. Most of us protect our group identities by associating with people we think are like us. Hence, it’s not surprising that most of our friendships are with people who are demographically and ideologically similar to us. And to a certain extent, judge members of different out-groups based on our ethnocentric perceptions of behavior. For example, some people ask questions like, “why does my Black friend talk about race so much;” “does my friend have to act ‘so’ gay when we’re in public;” or “I like my friend, but does she always have to talk to me about her religion.” In these three instances (race, sexual orientation, and religion), we see examples of judging someone’s communicative behavior based on their own in-group’s communicative behavioral norms. Especially for people who are marginalized, being marginalized is a part of who they are that cannot be separated from how they think and behave. Perhaps a friend discusses race because they are part of a marginalized racial group, which is their personal experience in life. “This is actually normal and understandable behavior on the part of these different groups. They are not the ones who make it the focus of their lives. Society—the rest of us—makes race or orientation or gender an issue for them—an issue that they cannot ignore, even if they wanted to. They have to face it every waking moment of their lives.”⁵⁸ People who live their lives in marginalized groups see this marginalization as part of their daily life, and it’s intrinsically intertwined with their identity.

Many of us will have the opportunity to develop cross-group friendships throughout our lives. As our society becomes more diverse, the likelihood of developing cross-group friendships also increases. In a large research project examining the outcomes associated with cross-group friendships, the researchers found that two factors were the most important in developing cross-group friendships: racism and exposure to cross-group friendships. First, individuals who are racist are less likely to engage in cross-group friendships.⁵⁹ Second, actual exposure to cross-group friendships can lead to more intergroup contact and more positive attitudes toward members of those groups.

Ultimately, successful cross-group friendships succeed or fail based on two primary factors: time and self-disclosure.⁶⁰ First, successful cross-group friendships take time to develop, so don’t expect them to happen overnight. These relationships will take more time to develop as you navigate your cultural differences, in addition to navigating the terms of the friendship itself. Now, it’s essential that when we use the word “time” here, we are referring not only to longitudinal time, but also to the amount of time we spend with the other person. The more we interact with someone from another group, the stronger our friendship will become.

Second, successful cross-group friendships involve high amounts of self-disclosure. We must be open and honest with our thoughts and feelings. We need to discuss not only the surface-level issues in our lives, but also have deeper, more meaningful conversations about who we are as individuals and how our cultural backgrounds shape us. One of our coauthor's best friends is from a different racial background. All of our coauthors grew up in the southern part of the United States, and one of our coauthors' friends also grew up in an inner-city area of Los Angeles. When the two of them met, they had very different lived experiences related to both race and geographic differences. Their connection was almost instantaneous, but the friendship grew out of many long nights spent in conversation over the years.

Mediated Friendships

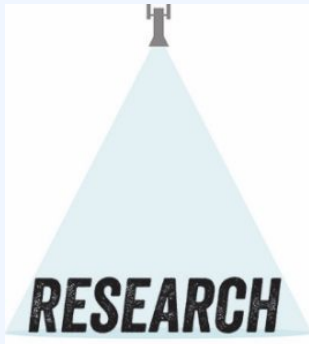
Probably nothing has more radically altered what the words “friend” and “friendship” mean has been the widespread use of social technology. Although the Internet, as such, has been around since 1969 and was consistently used for the exchange of messages all the way through the 1990s, the public didn't start to become more actively involved with the technology until it became cheap enough to use in one's daily life. Before December 1996, using the “information superhighway” was limited to tech professionals, colleges and universities, the government, and hobbyists. Before December 1996, the pricing model for Internet use had been similar to that of a telephone subscription. You paid a base rate that allowed you a certain number of hours each month (usually 10) of connected Internet time, and then you paid an additional rate for each subsequent hour. People who were highly active on the Internet racked up enormous bills. Of course, this all changed in December 1996 when America Online (AOL) decided to offer its internet service provider to the world for \$19.95 per month for unlimited usage. This change in the pricing structure ultimately led to the first significant wave of people jumping online, as it was now economically feasible.

The Internet that we all know and love today bears little resemblance to the landscape of the late 20th century. A great deal has changed in the first 20 years of the new millennium regarding technology and how we utilize it to interact with our friends and family. For our purposes, we will focus on the issue of mediated friendships in this section. We'll discuss computer-mediated communication, in general, in [Chapter 12](#).

In the earliest days of online friendships, technology was commonly used to interact with people at a greater geographic distance. You met friends in chatrooms or on bulletin boards (precursors to modern social media), and most often, these people were not ones in your town, state, or even country. By 2002, 72% of college students were interacting with their friends online.⁶¹ This is the same year Friendster is created, the year before MySpace comes into existence, and a solid two years before Facebook is created (February 4, 2004). In 2002, most interactions were conducted through email, instant messaging, and chat rooms. Today, we talk less about using the Internet and more about what types of applications people are using on their smartphones (The iPhone came out on June 29, 2007). For example, in 2018, 68% of U.S. adults used Facebook. By comparison, 81% of adults 18 to 29 use Facebook, while only 41% of U.S. adults over the age of 65 are using Facebook.⁶² What about other common apps, 73% use YouTube, 35% use Instagram, 29% use Pinterest, 27% use Snapchat, 25% use LinkedIn, 24% use Twitter, and 22% use WhatsApp.

All of these different technologies have enabled us to keep in touch with each other in ways that didn't exist at the beginning of the 21st century. As such, the nature of the terms “friend” and “friendship” has changed. For example, how does one differentiate between a friend someone has primarily online and a friend someone sees face-to-face daily? Does the type of technology we use help us explain the nature of our friendships? Let's explore both questions.

Research Spotlight



What makes you attached to social companion AI? A two-stage exploratory mixed-method study

Social companion AIs are becoming much more prevalent. There are many situations in which an AI companion or “friend” could be beneficial. Currently,

ElliQ is a robot companion who helps foster independence and healthy living. ElliQ users say “She makes me feel like I’m important...” and “She cares about me, and makes sure I’m doing okay.”

These are testimonials from senior individuals. Another senior citizen state, “It can be a little lonely when you live by yourself, but having ElliQ here, it’s like having someone in the house that can help you with different things.” <https://elliq.com/pages/testimonials>

While AI technology provides health benefits and companionship, companionship can also spill into the range of intimate relationships.

So, just what are the individual driving factors for *intimate* interactions between humans and SCAI?

RQ2. : What are the fundamental reasons behind the formation and sustained development of attachment relationships between humans and SCAI?

RQ3. : What are the different manifestations of individuals’ emotional attachment to SCAI

What's a Friend?

As mentioned at the very beginning of this chapter, one of the biggest changes to the story of friendship has been the dilution of the term “friendship.” In some ways, this dilution is a result of social networking sites like Friendster, Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, etc. Today, we “friend” people on Facebook that we wouldn’t have had any contact with 20 years ago. We have expanded the term “friend” to include everything from casual acquaintances to best friends. When we compare William Rawlins six stages of friendship to how we use the term “friend” in the mediated context,

you'll see that everything from friendly relations to stabilized friendships gets the same generic term, "friend."⁶³

One Australian writer, Mobinah Ahmad realized that the term "friend" was being widely used and often didn't fit the exact nature of the relationships she experienced. She created a six stage theory (see sidebar) to express how she views the nature of friendships in the time of Facebook. She started by analyzing her 538 "friends" on Facebook. The overwhelming majority of these "friends" really were acquaintances. In fact, of the 538 friends Ahmad had, she claimed that only one of them was a "true friend."⁶⁴

Friendship Acquaintance Six Stage Theory

Dear person reading this,

Find out where you fit in and the next time I tell you we aren't friends don't get offended. Now you'll know why. Love, Moby. P.S. This is not some exclusive thing, where I'm telling people they're unworthy. It's telling it like it is.

PreAcquaintance (10% of people I know)

- We don't know each other.
- We know each other's name only.

Acquaintance Level 1: To know of someone 20% of people I know

- We know of each other through mutual friends/acquaintances.
- We met briefly at a party/social event/uni.
- You're a work colleague or business client (who I haven't spent much time with).
- We run into each other now and then by coincidence.
- Convenient Interactions Meeting up is not planned, and only because it is convenient and easy.
- Details about each other are superficial.

Acquaintance Level 2: Liking & Preliminary Care 30% of people I know.

- We went to school/university together, or have known you for a long period of time.
- We usually meet in groups, rarely one-on-one.
- If you needed my help, I would actively participate in helping them to the best of my ability.
- I can handle a 20-minute smalltalk chat with you, any longer and I will get bored.

Acquaintance Level 3: Significant Connection & Care 25% of people I know.

- We have a really good connection.
- We have some very meaningful talks
- We care a lot about each other.

- We don't see each other all that much, just now and then when we plan to meet.

PreFriend (AKA Potential Friend) 14% of people I know

- Someone I wish were a friend (as defined below and NOT as society currently defines it)
- I want to spend more time with this person and establish a proper friendship with them.

Friend: Mutual Feelings of Love 1% of people I know

- I care immensely in every domain of their life (academic, physical, mental well-being), how their relationships with their loved ones are. I also care about their thoughts, ideas, elations and fears.
- I can easily give my honest opinion and thoughts.
- This person notices when I am upset through subtle indications.
- I see this person regularly and feel totally comfortable to contact them for a deep and meaningful talk.
- Someone who takes initiative and makes sacrifices to work on this friendship.
- Mutual trust, respect, admiration, forgiveness and unconditional care. Note: If it's not mutual, then we're not friends.

Further Notes

1. There is no shame in being an acquaintance. I think society has made the word derogatory and that is why it seems offensive. It's just about being honest.
2. Friendship is not that complicated to me (I know, the irony of making up a theory and calling it uncomplicated). There may be a small few that cannot be categorized because there is history and shades of grey but I look at my relationship with most people as being Black or White, categorized, uncomplicated.
3. The theory is flexible in the sense that people can go up or down the levels and understands that throughout a dynamic friendship, people become closer or further apart from each other.
4. My theory originates from personal experiences. I realize that one of my biggest vulnerabilities is that I'm too sentimental; this theory combats this problem quite efficiently.
5. I understand that this theory cannot be applied to everyone, but it significantly helps me.

Reprinted with Permission of the Author, Mobinah Ahmad.

Now that you've had a minute to read through Mobinah Ahmad's six stage theory of friendships and acquaintances, how do you see this playing out in your own life? How many people do you label as a "friend" really are acquaintances?

Technologies and Friendships

Today a lot of our interaction with friends is now mediated in some fashion. Whether it's through phone calls and texts or social media, gaming platforms, Skype, and other interactive technologies, we interact with our friends in new and unique ways. For example, a 2018 study found that 60% of today's teenagers interact with their friends online daily while only 24% saw their friends daily.⁶⁵ Interacting online with people is fulfilling some of the basic functions that used to be filled through traditional face-to-face friendships for today's modern teenagers. Teens who spend time interacting with others in an online group or forum say that these interactions played a role in exposing them to new people (74%), making them feel more accepted (68%), figuring out important issues (65%), and helping them through lifetimes in life (55%).

But, are all technologies created equal when it comes to friendships? In a study by Dong Liu and Chia-chen Yang, the researchers set out to determine if how we perceive our friendships differs based on the communication technologies we use to interact.⁶⁶ The researchers examined data gathered from 22 different research samples collected by researchers worldwide. Ultimately, the researchers found that there is a difference in how we use technologies to interact with friends. They labeled the two categories as Internet-independent (e.g., calls, texts) and Internet-dependent (e.g., instant messaging, social networking sites, gaming). Of the different technologies examined, "Mobile phone-based channels had stronger associations with friendship closeness, suggesting that phone calls and texting were predominantly used with the closest associates." As a side note, the researchers did not find sex differences regarding communication technology use and friendship intimacy.

Research Spotlight

In 2018, Bree McEwan, Erin Sumner, Jennifer Eden, and Jennifer Fletcher set out to examine relational maintenance strategies on Facebook among friends. Previous research by McEwan found that Facebook members employed three distinct relational maintenance strategies.⁶⁷

1. Social Contact—personalizing messages to specific friends via Facebook.
2. Relational Assurances—demonstrating one's commitment to continuing a relationship on Facebook.
3. Response Seeking—sending messages to a large number of people via Facebook in the hopes of getting input from an array of people.



In this study, the researchers found social contact, relational assurances, and response seeking were all positively related to liking, relational closeness, relationship satisfaction, and relationship commitment.

Key Takeaways

- Research shows there is more overlap than difference between same-sex friendships. Both men and women form friendships based on activities, support, problem-solving, and reciprocity—though women are more communal and expressive, while men often bond through shared activities.
- J. Donald O'Meara identified five challenges of cross-sex friendships:
 - Emotional bond (risk of misinterpreting closeness as romantic)
 - Sexuality (latent or overt sexual attraction may complicate the relationship)
 - Inequality and power (societal gender imbalances affect relational dynamics)
 - Public perception (outsiders often assume romance or question legitimacy)
 - Opportunity structure (social systems often limit cross-sex friendship formation)
- Postmodern friendship is a concept where individuals co-construct the meaning of their relationship through communication, rather than relying on traditional gender or sexual identity categories.
- Cross-group friendships—between individuals from different cultural or social groups—are shaped by time and self-disclosure. These friendships develop slowly and require meaningful conversations to build trust across differences.
- Mediated technologies have changed how we form and maintain friendships. Texting and calling are linked to closer ties, while social media expands connections but blurs the line between acquaintances and close friends.

Exercises

1. In your view, what is a postmodern friendship, and why is it an important perspective for communication scholars? Would any of your friendships fall within this framework? Why?
2. Think of a time when you've had a cross-group friendship. What made it a cross-group friendship? How did this friendship differ from your same-group friendships?

How was it similar to your same-group friendships? If you were explaining to another person the importance of cross-group friendships in your own life, what would you tell them?

3. Do you think the word “friend” has been devalued through the use of social media? When you look at Mobinah Ahmad’s six-stage theory of friendships, do you agree with her perspective? Why?

Key Terms

active friendships

affect

agentic friendships

commemorative friendships

communal friendships

communication competence

contextual dialectics

cross-group friendship

dormant friendships

interactional dialectics

postmodern friendships

Chapter Wrap-Up

Friendship is a vital component of our interpersonal relationships. As such, we should never take our friendships for granted. For this reason, it’s important to remember that friendships (like all relationships) take work. In this chapter, we started by exploring the nature and characteristics of friendship. We then examined the stages and types of friendships. We concluded this chapter by examining friendships in various contexts.

Chapter Exercises

Real-World Case Study

Friendships often blossom between people, surprising those around them. For example, two U.S. Supreme Court Justices, Antonin Scalia and Ruth Bader Ginsburg, were known for having a decade’s long friendship despite being on polar opposite ends of the political spectrum. They served together on the Supreme Court for 22 years until Scalia died in 2016. However, their actual friendship dates back to the 1980s, when they both served on the federal circuit court in Washington, D.C.

This unlikely friendship pair were known to travel together with their spouses, and both had an affinity for the opera. Scalia was Ginsburg's favorite souvenir shopping buddy when the two went on trips. There's even a famous picture of the two of them riding an elephant together during a trip to India.

So, how did the two handle their friendship when the two were such opposite ends of the political spectrum? Scalia once noted that if someone cannot agree to disagree while on the bench with others and remain friends, then they probably need to get a different job.

1. Do you think friendships of this type are possible, given the deep political divides that plague the United States?
2. Why do you think Scalia and Ginsburg's friendship withstood the test of time and politics?
3. How can you analyze this friendship using what you've learned in this chapter?

End-of-Chapter Assessment

1. Which of William K. Rawlins' friendship characteristics is the one marked by issues of emotional connection?
 - a. Affective
 - b. Equality
 - c. Mutual
 - d. Personal
 - e. Voluntary
2. Which stage of friendship development is marked by four specific communication behaviors: (1) moves away from what is required in the specific role relationship, (2) fewer lines and less stereotyped interaction, (3) individual violations of public propriety, and (4) greater spontaneity?
 - a. Friendly Relations
 - b. Moves-Toward-Friendship
 - c. Nascent Friendship
 - d. Post-Friendship
 - e. Waning Friendship
3. Joan is one of those people who has a lot of friendships. She has friends from when she was a young kid to friendships she developed this year. She just has a tendency of getting new friends and adding them to the list of friends she already has. Which of Sarah H. Matthews' friendship styles does Joan reflect?
 - a. Acquisitive
 - b. Affective
 - c. Communal
 - d. Discerning
 - e. Independent
4. _____ friendships are marked by activity.
 - a. Acquisitive
 - b. Affective

- c. Agentic
 - d. Communal
 - e. Discerning
5. A _____ friendship is one where participants co-construct the individual and dyadic realities within specific friendships.
- a. Affective
 - b. Agentic
 - c. Independent
 - d. Postmodern
 - e. Relational

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Chapter 11: Family & Marriage Relationships



“Family” by [Rajiv Perera](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Families are one of the essential relationships that all of us have in our lifetimes. Admittedly, there are a wide range of family types: adopted families, foster families, stepfamilies, nuclear families, and the families we make. According to the latest research from the [U.S. Census Bureau](#), there are a wide range of different types of households in the United States today:¹

Family Households (127 million total)

1. Married Couple Households – 58.7 million

- With own children – 22.3 million
- Without children – 36.4 million

2. Cohabiting Couple Households – 8.8 million

- With own children – 2.9 million
- Without children – 5.9 million

3. Male Householder (No Spouse Present) – 23.9 million

- Living alone – 16.0 million
- With own children – 2.0 million
- With relatives, no own children – 3.7 million
- Only nonrelatives present – 2.2 million

4. Female Householder (No Spouse Present) – 35.5 million

- Living alone – 19.0 million
- With own children – 6.6 million
- With relatives, no own children – 8.2 million
- Only nonrelatives present – 1.7 million

This chapter will explore the various types of family relationships and conclude by examining marriage.

Family Relationships

Learning Objectives

1. Differentiate among traditional, academic, and inclusive definitions of the term “family.”
2. Describe the two primary types of family communication patterns and how they function.
3. Classify family communication styles into the four main pattern types.
4. Explain key principles of family systems theory as applied to family communication.
5. Illustrate how systems theory concepts such as interdependence, boundaries, and equifinality apply to family interactions.

We interact within our families and begin learning our family communication pattern from the time we are born. Families are comparable to cultures in that each family has its own values, rituals, customs, beliefs, values, and practices. Interactions with other families reveal that there are vast differences among families. You may notice that the family down the street yells at each other almost constantly. Yelling is their baseline interaction, whereas another family never raises their voices and may seem to speak so infrequently that it appears that they have nothing to talk about within their family unit. And yet another family might talk to each other all the time and constantly do everything together. These differences and our tendency as humans to make comparisons cause individuals to assess the value of the various styles of family communication.

Defining Family

One of the biggest challenges for family researchers has been to define the “family.” The ambiguity of the term “family” has often been seen in the academic literature. The definition of the family developed by Ernest W. Burgess was the first widely used definition by academics.² The term “family” was described as “two or more persons joined by ties of marriage, blood, or adoption; constituting a single household; interacting and communicating with each other in their respective social roles of husband and wife, mother and father, son and daughter, brother and sister; and creating and maintaining a common culture.”³ According to Burgess a family must be legally tied together, live together, interact together, and maintain a common culture together. The first three aspects of Burgess’ definition are pretty easy to conceptualize, but the concept of common culture deserves further explanation. Common culture consists of those communication interactions (day-to-day communication) and cultural tools (communication acts learned from one’s culture previous to the marriage) that each person brings into the marriage or family. The various tools and interactions form a unique and individual subculture that exists within the context of the new family. A couple can pick and choose from their various backgrounds which communicative acts are most important to them and integrate those into the family unit. If a couple has communicative acts that are polarized, then a couple will need to negotiate and form new ways of communicating. Burgess’ definition of the family was useful because he was the first to examine the family structure’s attempt to maintain a common culture, but it also has many serious problems that cannot be ignored. Burgess’ definition of the word “family” excludes single-parent families, commuter families, bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgendered/transsexual families, and families who do not choose to, or are unable to, have children.

After examining the flaws of Burgess’ definition of the word “family,” an anthropologist, George Peter Murdock, attempted to define the family, “Social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation, and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults.”⁴ Once again, this definition only allows for heterosexual couples who have children to be considered a family because of the “socially approved” sexual relationship clause.

Another problem with this definition deals with the required inclusion of children for a couple to be labeled as a family. Many couples are unable to have children. Yet other couples opt not to have children. Does this really mean that they are not families? Couples, with or without children, should be considered as family units. All in all, this definition gave more direction than the Burgess one, but it is still extremely ambiguous and exclusive.

Another anthropologist, Bronislaw Malinowski, was looking at tribal familial structures all over the world at the turn of the century and defined the family as having 1) boundaries, 2) common residence, and 3) mutual affection for one another.⁵ Malinowski’s definition deals primarily with the fact that in different cultures around the world, a family member may include anyone from the immediate family of origin who gave birth to a person, to any member of the society into which one is born. Many African tribes see the tribe as being the family unit, and the tribe takes it upon itself to raise the children.

Statistical Definition of 'Family' Unchanged Since 1930

By David Pemberton (2015, January 28)

What is the Census Bureau's definition of "family"?

Printed decennial census reports from 1930 to the present are consistent in their definition of "family." The 2010 version states: "A family consists of a householder and one or more other people living in the same household who are related to the householder by birth, marriage or adoption."

The 1930 version is strikingly similar: "Persons related in any way to the head of the family by blood, marriage or adoption are counted as members of the family."

But prior to 1930, the definition of a family was quite different.

The 1920 version went like this: "The term 'family' as here used signifies a group of persons, whether related by blood or not, who live together as one household, usually sharing the same table. One person living alone is counted as a family, and, on the other hand, the occupants or inmates of a hotel or institution, however numerous, are treated as a single family."

The 1900 Census announced: "The word family has a much wider application, as used for census purposes, than it has in ordinary speech. As a census term, it may stand for a group of individuals who occupy jointly a dwelling place or part of a dwelling place or for an individual living alone in any place of abode. All the occupants and employees of a hotel, if they regularly sleep there, make up a single family, because they occupy one dwelling place ..."

The older definition is closer to the current use of the term "household."

Enumerator instructions beginning in at least 1860 and extending at least through 1940 emphasize this older definition of family.

Here is an example from the 1860 instructions: "By the term 'family' is meant either one person living separately and alone in a house, or a part of a house, and providing for him or herself, or several persons living together in a house, or part of a house, upon one common means of support and separately from others in similar circumstances. A widow living alone and separately providing for herself, or 200 individuals living together and provided for by a common head, should each be numbered as one family."

The 1870 instructions add the element of eating together as one defining element of a family: "Under whatever circumstances, and in whatever numbers, people live together under one roof, and are provided for at a common table, there is a family in the meaning of the law."

By 1930, the concept of a “household” had become more important and by implication was separated from the term “family”: “A household for census purposes is a family or any other group of persons, whether or not related by blood or marriage, living together with common housekeeping arrangements in the same living quarters.”

In 1960, the concepts of household and family were even more clearly delineated: “A household consists of a group of people who sleep in the same dwelling unit and usually have common arrangements for the preparation and consumption of food. Most households consist of a related family group. In some cases, you may find three generations represented in one household. Some household members may have no family relationship to the central group — boarders and servants, for example — but they should be included with the household if they eat and sleep in the same dwelling unit.”

In summary, the definition of family before 1930 was more similar to today’s definition of household. However, since 1930, the definition of family has remained the same, and includes those who are related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption.

<https://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/random-samplings/2015/01/statistical-definition-of-family-unchanged-since-1930.html>

The United States’ societal concept of the term “family” became very rigid during the 1950s when the family was depicted by social norms and the media as a mother, father, 2.5 offspring, and the family dog living together behind a white picket fence in the suburbs.⁶ Though this is currently what many Americans picture as the typical 1950s’ family, the reality was considerably different. According to Steven Mintz and Susan Kellog the family structure was very weak in the 1950s.⁷ Women started using tranquilizers as a method for dealing with normal household duties, and the divorce rate skyrocketed when compared with the 1940s. Currently, only around seven percent of U.S. families participate in the so-called “traditional” 1950s-style family with Ozzie, the breadwinning father, and Harriet, the happy homemaking mother, enjoying their first marriage, which has produced two or more school-aged children.⁸

During the 1970s, a variety of psychologists attempted to define the term “family.” Arthur P. Bochner defined the family as “an organized, naturally occurring relational interaction system, usually occupying a common living space over an extended time, and possessing a confluence of interpersonal images which evolve through the exchange of messages over time.”⁹ ¹⁰ Though this definition is broad enough to allow for a variety of relationships to be considered families, the definition is too vague. It has allowed almost anything to be considered a family. Take, for example, individuals who live in a dormitory setting either at a college or in the military. The first part of Bochner’s definition of family is that it has an organized, naturally occurring relational interaction system. In essence, this means that any group that has organization and interacts through various relationships accomplishes part of what it means to be a family. People who live in dormitories interact through various relationships on a regular basis. Whether it be relating with one’s roommate or

with the other people who live in the rooms next to you, people in dorms do interact. Dormitories are generally highly organized. People are required to listen to complex directors and Resident Assistants (on a collegiate level). Also, with the myriad of dormitory softball teams and other activities, interaction occurs regularly.

The second part of Bochner's definition of the family deals with occupying a common living space for an extended period. People who live in college dormitories do so for around a year. To many transient people, this can be seen as an extended period. The extended time clause is very awkward simply because of its ambiguity.

The last aspect of Bochner's definition of the family deals with the possession of interpersonal images that evolve through communication. Many people who live in the same space will start to acquire many stories and anecdotes concerning those people with whom they are in close proximity. Whether it be remembering the night that a group went on a beer run or the time when everyone pulled together to win the intramural softball competition, a variety of interpersonal images will be created through communication.

As can be seen through the previous discussion, dormitories are facilities where people cohabitate with others for extended amounts of time and share interpersonal images that change over time. The people who live in dorms under this definition could be considered as a family unit. These groups of people should not be considered as a family unit because dorm residents lack the permanence that is needed within a family structure. Once an academic year is over, the people go their directions, and many people will never see or talk to those people with whom they once lived. A family has an ongoing relationship that is constantly functioning even when the individuals are forced to live apart from the family of origin. Once again, here is a definition that does not allow for a concise explanation that can be easily applied when analyzing a family unit.

To understand the concept of a family, the definitions should be combined in a way that encompasses all types of family structures (e.g., single-parent, LGBTQIA2S+, non-married parents, etc.). For our purposes a **family** is defined as two or more people tied by marriage, blood, adoption, or choice; living together or apart by choice or circumstance; having interaction within family roles; creating and maintaining a common culture; being characterized by economic cooperation; deciding to have or not to have children, either own or adopted; having boundaries; and claiming mutual affection. This does not necessarily say that all types of families are healthy or legal, but that all cohabiting groups that consider themselves to be families should be researched as such to understand the specific interactions within the group. Though one may disagree with a specific family group, understanding the group through a family filter can lend itself to a better understanding than could be reached by analyzing the group through an organizational filter. To understand this definition of family, an analysis of the various aspects of this study's definition shall be done to help clarify this definition.

The "Messiness" of Modern Families

What does your family look like?

How does your family communicate?

Do you all live in the same location or are your families spread far apart?

How does your family come together during moments of crisis?

All families look different. Family is what we make. One of the authors lived in Cleveland, OH for 11 years and left behind friends she considers family. Those friends communicate via computer mediated communication every holiday because we got together on holidays because we were all geographically separated from our blood relatives.

Essayist Samuel J. Taylor (2025) recounted his family's experiences in his essay, "From the United States to the United Kingdom: Hope, Blended Family Social Support, and Computer-Mediated Communication Amidst Chronic Illness".

He calls upon us to embrace the messiness of our family situations.

"The constraints of blended family dynamics, geographical distance, and computer-mediated communication technologies constitute the nuances and messiness that must be embraced when we set out to socially support our loved ones from afar" (p. 1382).¹¹

Taylor's essay is an example of "modern" family design. Taylor (2025) explained, "I have constant and fruitful relationships with both of my parents; however, my parents – while civil – do not have an intentional relationship and rarely communicate. Given this reality, I effectively maintain communication with two separate families: my dad, stepmom, and brother on one side, and my mom, stepdad, sisters, nephews, and niece on the other" (p. 1382).

His essay highlights some concepts that affect interpersonal relationships:

- blended family dynamics
- geographic distance
- computer mediated communication
- social support

Marriage, Blood, Adoption, or Choice

The first part of the definition says that a family is "two or more people tied by marriage, blood, adoption, or choice." This part of the definition allows for a variety of family options that would not be accepted otherwise. This definition also allows for children who become part of a foster family to have a family that they can consider their own, even if they are switched from family to family. Non-married couples who consider themselves a family should also be researched as such. This aspect of the definition does open itself to some family types that are seen as illegal (e.g., family members marrying each other). This definition does not attempt to create a legal definition of family as much as it attempts to create a definition under which the family can be studied. As mentioned earlier, not all

forms of family are necessarily healthy or legal. This part of the definition opens the field of family study while the remaining criteria narrow the focus so that not just any group can call itself a family.

Cohabitation

The second part of the definition of family indicates that the cohabitants may live together or apart by choice or circumstance. There are a variety of married couples who are not able to live in the same place because of occupation. According to Naomi Gerstel and Harriet Engel Goss, a commuter family is such a family:

The existence of marriages in which spouses separate in the service of divergent career demands at least suggests a need to question both the presupposition that coresidence is necessary for marital viability and its corollary that husbands and wives necessarily share economic fates. Dubbed “commuter,” “long-distance” or “two location” families, these marriages entail the maintenance of two separate residences by spouses who are apart from one another for periods ranging from several days per week to months at a time.¹²

These marriages, seen as nontraditional by many, are becoming an increasingly more common occurrence within the United States. Any member of the military who is stationed in the United States and sent to other parts of the world without their family experiences the problems caused by commuter marriages. Just because these families are not able to live under the same roof does not mean that they are not a family.

Family Roles

The third criterion of the definition of “family” suggests that the persons interact within family roles. These roles include such terms as mom, dad, son, daughter, wife, husband, spouse, and offspring. When an adult decides to be the guardian either by birth, adoption, or choice, the adult has taken on the role of a father or mother. When a group takes on the roles of parental figures and child figures, they have created a family system within which they can operate. Some of these roles can be related to the understanding of extended family as well, such as grandmother, aunt, uncle, niece, nephew, and the like. These roles and the rules that cultures associate with them have a definite impact on how a family will function.

Common Culture

The fourth aspect, creating a common culture, stems directly from Burgess’ definition.¹³ Couples bring other aspects (communicative acts, history, cultural differences, etc.) of their lives into the family to create the new subculture that exists in the new family. This can be done whether you have two men, a mother and daughter, or a husband and wife. When a couple joins to create a family unit, they are bringing both of their cultural backgrounds to the union, thus creating a unique third family culture that combines the two initial family cultures.

Economic Cooperation

The fifth trait of a family deals with economic cooperation, or the general pooling of family resources for the benefit of the entire family. Economic cooperation is typically thought of in the context of nuclear families, but in commuter families, both units typically pool their resources in order to keep both living establishments operational. Even though the family is unable to live together, the funds from both parties are used for the proper upkeep and maintenance of each location. In many instances, overseas military men and women will send their paychecks to their families back in the states because they will not need the money while they are out at sea or abroad, and their families still have bills that must get paid. Economic cooperation allows families who have dual earners to establish a more egalitarian relationship between the spouses since no one person is seen as the worker and the other as the non-worker.

Children

The sixth component of the definition of a family deals with children as a component of a family. Many researchers have said that for a family to exist, it must have offspring.^{14 15 16} This would mean that a couple who is infertile and only wants to raise children if they are biologically related would not be considered a family. This also prevents couples who do not desire to have children from achieving a family status. There are many unions of people who are not able to have children or do not desire to have children who are clearly families.

Established Boundaries

The seventh characteristic of a family deals with the need for the family to establish boundaries. Family boundaries is a concept that stems from family systems theory. According to Janet Beavin Bavelas and Lynn Segal, boundaries are those aspects of a family that prevent the family from venturing beyond the family unit.¹⁷ Boundaries function as a means for a family to determine the size and the scope of family interactions with the greater system or society. The family can let information into the family or exclude it from the family.

An example of this can be seen in religious parents/guardians who are coming to terms with the fact that their son is gay. These parents/guardians often reject information from the family system that would indicate that homosexuality is natural. In this example, the parents/guardians draw an informational boundary and refuse to let information that could contradict their position into the family system. Also, families do not function entirely in conjunction with the system of which they are a part. Families must filter information or risk information overload. Families have naturally occurring and created boundaries that decide how a family should and should not operate. Many families create boundaries that deal with religious discussion, or they do not allow for any rejection of the family's religious beliefs on any level. This is an example of a boundary that a family can create. Conversely, there are boundaries that a family must respect because of societal laws. Understanding these boundaries is necessary because it allows the researcher a greater understanding of the context in which the family lives.

Love and Trust

The eighth, and final, trait of a family, mutual affection, deals with the concept of love and trust that a family tends to possess to help them journey through conflict situations. Mutual affection also means that an individual must have a desire to be within the family or possess the freedom to leave the family system when they are of age. Families are not coercive entities but entities in which all participants can make personal decisions freely belong. Leaving the family system does not guarantee that a member of a family will be able to lose all connections to the family itself. Besides, the family will have had an impact on members that will affect them even if they leave the family of origin and cut all ties.

Understanding the definitions presented about the family and their obvious limitations will help the understanding of the usefulness of this new definition. Too often, definitions of the word “family” have been so narrow in scope that only some families were studied, and thus the research into the family came from only a very narrow and rigid perspective. Defining what constitutes a family is a difficult task, but without a clear definition, the study of family communication cannot be done effectively.

Family Communication Patterns

Two communication researchers, Jack M. McLeod and Steven H. Chaffee, found that most models of families relied on dichotomous ideas (e.g., autocratic/democratic, controlling/permissive, modern/traditional; etc.).¹⁸ Instead of relying on these perspectives, McLeod and Chaffee realized that family communication happens along two different continuums: socio-orientation and concept-orientation. In a series of further studies, David Ritchie and Mary Anne Fitzpatrick identified two family communication patterns: conformity orientation and conversation orientation.^{19 20}

Socio-Orientation

To McLeod and Chaffee, **socio-oriented** (conformity oriented) families are indicated by “the frequency of (or emphasis on) communication that is designed to produce deference, and to foster harmony and pleasant social relationships in the family.”²¹ Families high in socio-orientation tend to communicate a similarity of attitudes, beliefs, and values. Similarity and harmony are valued while conflict is avoided. Family members maintain interdependence within a hierarchical structure. One of the authors comes from a family where similarity and harmony were valued to the extent that any amount of disagreement was frowned upon. The parent never (literally) argued or disagreed in front of the children. Despite the desires of her parents, the personalities of the children soon emerged and revealed that neither child could go along with total similarity and harmony. One child dealt with this difference by learning to keep his opinions to himself. The other sibling, who happened to be the oldest child, never learned to keep her opinion to herself. Her communication style simply did not align with the conformity orientation friction was the result. You may have similar experiences if your communication style is different from your family’s communication orientation.

Concept-Orientation

To McLeod and Chaffee, **concept-oriented** (conversation oriented) families use “positive constraints to stimulate the child to develop his own views about the world, and to consider more than one side of an issue.”²² High concept-orientation families engage in open and frequent communication. Family life and interactions are often perceived as pleasurable. Self-expression is encouraged when making family decisions. Parents and guardians communicate with their children in a way that allows them to socialize and educate them. Understanding the communication pattern within a family can lead to the ability to adapt to the family communication pattern rather than consistently communicating in a manner that is uncomfortable within the family structure.

Take a few moments and complete the Family Communication Patterns Scale (16-Item) located below. Before proceeding, it’s essential to note that the FCPS-16 is not a diagnostic tool and was developed for this book based on a range of measures designed to measure these ideas. This will give you a general idea of your family’s communication patterns, but it has not been tested in actual research.

Family Communication Patterns Scale (16-Item)

Instructions: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement about communication in your family. Use the following scale:

Never True	Rarely True	Sometimes True	Often True	Almost Always True
1	2	3	4	5

Work quickly; record your first impression.

- _____1. In my family, we are encouraged to share our personal opinions on various topics.
- _____2. My family values open discussions where different viewpoints can be expressed.
- _____3. Family members are expected to think critically about issues before forming opinions.
- _____4. We often have conversations where family members can disagree respectfully.
- _____5. My parents/guardians want me to develop my own perspective on important matters.
- _____6. In our family, asking questions and exploring ideas is welcomed.
- _____7. Family discussions often involve considering multiple sides of an issue.
- _____8. My family believes it’s important for everyone to express their thoughts freely.

- _____9. In my family, maintaining harmony is more important than expressing disagreement.
- _____10. Family members are expected to share similar values and beliefs.
- _____11. My parents/guardians expect children to accept their decisions without question.
- _____12. In our family, we avoid topics that might create conflict or disagreement.
- _____13. Family members should present a united front to outsiders.
- _____14. My family values agreement and similarity among all members.
- _____15. Children in my family are taught to defer to their parents' judgment.
- _____16. Keeping peace in the family is prioritized over individual expression.

Scoring:

To compute subscale scores, sum the items for each subscale as indicated below.

- **Conversation Orientation Score:** Sum items 1-8 (Range: 8-40)
 - Higher scores indicate greater emphasis on open communication and critical thinking
- **Conformity Orientation Score:** Sum items 9-16 (Range: 8-40)
 - Higher scores indicate greater emphasis on harmony, hierarchy, and agreement

Family Communication Pattern Classification:

- **Consensual:** High Conversation (≥ 28) + High Conformity (≥ 28)
- **Pluralistic:** High Conversation (≥ 28) + Low Conformity (≤ 24)
- **Protective:** Low Conversation (≤ 24) + High Conformity (≥ 28)
- **Laissez-faire:** Low Conversation (≤ 24) + Low Conformity (≤ 24)

Based on the Research By:

Horstman, H. K., Schrodtt, P., Warner, B., Koerner, A., Maliski, R., Hays, A., & Colaner, C. W. (2018). Expanding the conceptual and empirical boundaries of family communication patterns: The development and validation of an Expanded Conformity Orientation Scale. *Communication Monographs*, 85(2), 157-180. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637751.2018.1428354>

McLeod, J. M., & Chaffee, S. R. (1972). The social construction of reality. In J. Tedeschi (Ed.), *The social influence processes* (pp. 50-99). Aldine-Atherton.

Ritchie, L. D., & Fitzpatrick, M. A. (1990). Family communication patterns: Measuring intrapersonal perceptions of interpersonal relationships. *Communication Research*, 17(4), 523–544. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009365090017004007>

Four Combinations

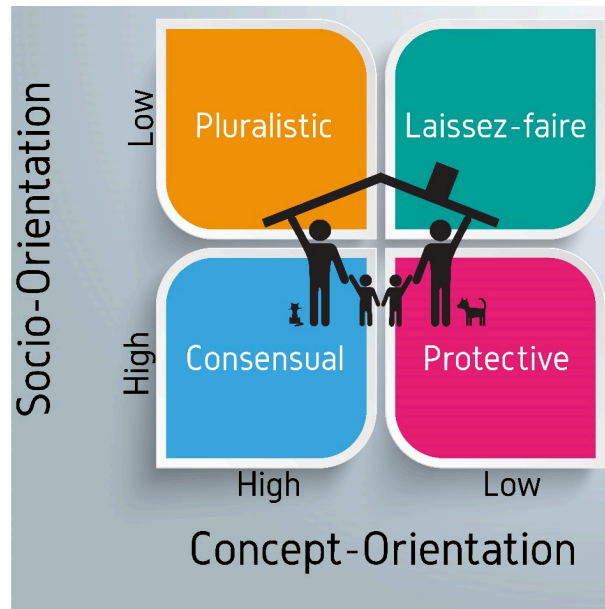


Figure 11.1. Family Communication Patterns

To further explain the concepts of socio- and concept-orientations, Jack M. McLeod and Steven H. Chaffee broke the combinations into four specific categories (Figure 11.1).

Consensual

The first family communication pattern is the consensual family, which is marked by both high levels of socio- and concept-orientation. The term “consensual” is used here because there is a tendency in these families to strive for or have pressure for agreement between parents/guardians and children. Children are encouraged to think outside the box as long as it doesn’t impact the parents/guardians’ power or the family hierarchy. However, “These conflicting pressures may induce the child to retreat from the parent/guardian-child interaction. There is some evidence of ‘escape’ by consensual children, such as strikingly heavy viewing of television fantasy programs.”²³

Protective

The second type of family communication pattern is the protective family, characterized by high levels of socio-orientation and low levels of concept-orientation. In these families, there is a strong emphasis on child obedience and family harmony. As such, children are taught that they should not openly disagree with their parents or guardians or engage in conversations where differences of opinion may arise. McLeod and Chaffee noted that parents/guardians strive to protect their children

from any controversy, which may actually make them more vulnerable to outside pressures and persuasion because they have not been taught how to be critical thinkers.

Pluralistic

The third type of family communication pattern is pluralistic, which is the opposite of the protective family and marked by high levels of concept-orientation and low levels of socio-orientation. In these families, “The emphasis in this communication structure seems to be on mutuality of respect and interests: the combination of an absence of social constraint plus a positive impetus to self-expression should foster both communication and competence.”²⁴ Some parents/guardians worry that this type of openness of thought actually creates problems in their children, but McLeod and Chaffee noted that these families have children who say they are more likely to want to grow up and be like their parents/guardians than the other three types.

Laissez-faire

The final family communication pattern, laissez-faire, is marked by both low concept- and socio-orientations. In these families, there is a lack of parent-child interaction or co-orientation. Instead, these children are more likely to be influenced by external factors, such as the media, peers, and other forces outside the family unit. McLeod and Chaffee said that these children are more like a control group in an experiment because of the hands-off nature of their communicative relationships with their patterns. As such, it’s somewhat difficult to discuss the effectiveness of this study of family communication.

Research Spotlight



In 2023, Paul Schrodtt and Haley Decker explored the intricate ways family communication patterns influence how young adult sexual minorities (SMs) manage their identity within the family, especially when parents are not fully accepting. Their study focused on how parents’ “nonaccommodation” (messages that emphasize differences or invalidate the child’s identity) and the child’s responses—“topic avoidance” (intentionally evading discussions about their sexual identity) and “surface acting” (masking true feelings to display expected emotions)—mediate the connection between family communication patterns (FCPs) and a “shared family identity” (SFI), which is the sense of belonging and common group identity within the family.²⁵ The study included 205 self-identified sexual minority adults

The findings highlight distinct pathways through which FCPs affect SFI. Family conversation orientation, which promotes open and unrestrained interaction on various topics, was directly associated with a stronger shared family identity with both parents. When parents

fostered an environment of open communication and allowed for diverse viewpoints, their SM children were less likely to avoid discussing LGBTQ+ topics or engage in surface acting about their sexual identity. This suggests that open family communication helps to reduce behaviors that can undermine relational quality and mental well-being for SMs.

Conversely, family conformity orientation, which emphasizes homogeneity of attitudes and obedience to parental authority, was linked to parents' nonaccommodation of their child's sexual identity. Parents who prioritize uniformity and control over their children's beliefs were more likely to express nonaccommodating messages, such as emphasizing divergent values or giving unwanted advice about their child's sexual orientation. These nonaccommodating messages, in turn, predicted an increase in the SM child's topic avoidance and surface acting with that parent.

A complex finding involved "suppression effects," where topic avoidance with one parent actually had a positive indirect association with shared family identity with the *other* parent. For example, greater topic avoidance with the father positively predicted SFI with the mother, and vice versa. This suggests that when one parent is nonaccommodating about an SM child's identity, leading the child to avoid that parent on LGBTQ+ topics, it might inadvertently create or strengthen an alliance and sense of shared identity with the other parent. This effect was strong when there was a significant discrepancy in how parents enacted nonaccommodating messages about the child's sexual identity, leading to less SFI with the father when parental nonaccommodation differed significantly. The study highlights how family communication dynamics, particularly those related to identity differences, can shape complex and sometimes unexpected relational alliances and a sense of belonging within the family.

Family Systems Theory

At the turn of the 20th Century, philosophers started questioning how humans organize things and our understanding of organizing. One critical theorist was Belarusian-born Alexander Aleksandrovich Bogdanov, who wrote a philosophical treatise on the nature of organization in 1922.²⁶ Bogdanov's ideas ultimately influenced Ludwig von Bertalanffy's general systems theory. In a series of works, Bertalanffy conceptualized what has become known as general systems theory.^{27 28,29,30} Bertalanffy defined a **system** as "sets of elements standing in interrelation."³¹ A classic mechanical system is a non-digital watch. Figure 11.2 shows the basic layout of a watch's innards.

In this illustration, we see how the balance wheel causes the fork pin to move, which turns the escapement wheel. The escapement wheel turns the third wheel (seconds), which turns the second wheel, which turns the first wheel (minutes), which turns the reduction gear, which turns the hour wheel. All of these different parts must work together to tell time. If a problem arises at any part of

Characteristics of Family Systems

Over the years, numerous researchers have furthered the basic ideas of Murray Bowen to further our understanding of family systems. Part of this process has been identifying different characteristics of family systems. According to Kathleen Galvin, Fran Dickson, and Sherilyn Marrow, there are seven essential characteristics of family systems: interdependence, wholeness, patterns/regularities, interactive complexity, openness, complex relationships, and equifinality.³⁸

Interdependence

The term interdependence means that changes in one part of the system will have ramifications for other parts of the system. For example, if one gear in your watch gets bent, the gear will affect the rest of the watch's ability to tell time. In this concept, the behaviors of one family member can influence the behavior of other family members. To combine this idea with family communication patterns described earlier, parents/guardians that are high in socio-orientation and low in concept-orientation will impact that children's willingness and openness to communicate about issues of disagreement.

On the larger issue of pathology, numerous diseases and addictions can impact how people behave and interact. If you have a family who has a child diagnosed with cancer, the focus of the entire family may shift to the care of that one child. If the parents/guardians rally the family in support, this diagnosis could bring everyone together. On the other hand, it's also possible that the complete focus of the parents/guardians turns to the ill child and the other children could feel unattended to or unloved, which could lead to feelings of isolation, jealousy, and resentment.

Wholeness

The concept of wholeness or holism involves viewing behaviors and outcomes within the context of the system. To understand how a watch tells time, you cannot just look at the fork pin's activity and understand the concept of time. In the same way, examining a single fight between two siblings cannot completely let you know everything you need to know about how that family interacts or how that fight came to happen. How siblings interact with one another can be manifestations of how they have observed their parents/guardians handle conflict or even extended family members like aunts/uncles, grandparents, and cousins.

Holism is often discussed in opposition to reductionism. Reductionists believe that the best way to understand someone's communicative behavior is to break it down into the simplest parts that make up the system. For example, if a teenager exhibits verbal aggression, a reductionist would explain the verbally aggressive behavior in terms of hormones (specifically testosterone and serotonin). Holistic systems thinkers don't negate the different parts of the system, but like to take a larger view of everything that led to the verbally aggressive behavior. For example, does the teenager mirror their family's verbally aggressive tendencies? Basically, what other parts of the system are at play when examining a single behavioral outcome?

Patterns/Regularities

Families, like any natural organism, like balance and predictability. To help with this balance and predictability, systems (including family systems) create a complex series of both rules and norms. Rules are dictates that are spelled out. Many children grow up hearing, “children are to be seen and not heard.” This rule dictates that in social situations, children are not supposed to make noise or engage in active communication with others. Norms, on the other hand, are patterns of behavior that emerge through the system. For example, maybe your mother has a home office, and everyone knows that when she is in her office, she should not be disturbed.

Of course, one of the problems with patterns and regularities is that they become deeply entrenched and cannot be changed or corrected quickly or easily. When a family is suddenly faced with a crisis event, these patterns and regularities may prevent the family from actively correcting the course. For example, imagine you live in a family where everyone is taught not to talk about the family’s problems with anyone outside the family. If one of the family members starts having problems, the family may try to circle the wagons and ultimately not get the help it needs. This is an example of a situation that occurred in one of our coauthors’ families. In this case, one of our coauthor’s cousins became an alcoholic during his teen years. We’ll call him Jesse. Very few people in the immediate family even know about Jesse’s problems. Jesse’s mother was a widely known community leader, so there was a family rule that said, “don’t make mom or our family look bad.” When Jesse’s parents found out about his alcoholism (though a DUI), they circled the wagons and tried to deal with the problem as a family. Unfortunately, dealing with a disease like alcoholism by closing ranks is not the best way to get someone treatment. One night Jesse’s mother was called out to an accident at a local night club where a drunk driver had hit several people. When Jesse’s mother showed up, it was only then that she learned that the drunk driver had been her son.

In this case, the rule about protecting the family’s image had become so ingrained, that the family hadn’t taken all of the steps necessary to get Jesse the help he needed. Although no one died in the accident, one young woman hit by Jesse was paralyzed for the rest of her life. Jesse ended up serving several years in prison.

Interactive Complexity

The concept of interactive complexity originates from the original work conducted by Murray Bowen on family systems theory.³⁹ In his initial research looking at schizophrenics, a lot of families labeled the schizophrenic as “the problem” or “the patient,” which allowed them to blame for family problems and interactions on the schizophrenic. Instead, Bowen realized that schizophrenia was one person’s diagnosis in a family system where there were usually multiple issues going on. Trying to reduce everything down to the one label, essentially letting everyone else “off the hook” for any blame for family problems, was not an accurate portrayal of the family.

Instead, it’s essential to consider interactions as complex and inherent to the system itself. For example, all married couples will have disagreements. Some married couples take these disagreements, and they become highly contentious fights. These fights are often repetitive. Mary asks Anne to take out the trash. The next day Mary sees that the trash hasn’t been taken out yet. Mary turns to Anne at breakfast and says, “are you ever going to take out the trash?” Anne quickly replies, “Stop nagging me already. I’ll get it done when I get it done.” Before too long, this becomes a fight

about Anne not listening to Mary from Mary's point of view, while the conversation becomes about Mary's constant nagging from Anne's point of view. Before long, the argument devolves into an argument about who started the conflict in the first place. Galvin, Dickson, and Marrow argue that trying to determine who started the conflict is not appropriate from a systems perspective, instead, researchers should focus on "current patterns serves to uncover ongoing complex issues."⁴⁰

Openness

The next major characteristic of systems is openness. The term openness refers to how permissive system boundaries are to their external environment. Some families have fairly open boundaries. These families facilitate a constant exchange of information between the external environment and the internal environment. Other families are considerably more rigid about system boundaries. For example, a family may be deeply religious and therefore does not allow television in the home. Furthermore, the family only allows reading materials that come strictly from their religious sect and actively prevents any ideas that may threaten their religious ideology. Here, the family has a very rigid and closed boundary. When families close themselves off from the external environment, they essentially isolate themselves. Children who are reared in highly isolated family systems often have problems interacting with other children when they come into contact with them in the external environment (like school). Some families will choose to homeschool their children as another means to keep the family system closed to foreign ideas and influences.

Complex Relationships

It's important to remember that all family systems also have multiple subsystems. One of the areas that Murray Bowen became very interested in was how family subsystems develop and function during times of crisis. In Bowen's view, a couple may be the basic unit within an emotional relationship. Still, any tension between the couple will usually result in one or both parties seeking solace in others. If there are not others within the family itself, partners will bring in external people into the instability. For example, James and Ralph just got married. After a recent argument, Ralph ended up talking to his best friend, Shelly, about the argument (11.3). Bowen argues a two-person system under stress will draw in a third party to provide balance, which ultimately creates a two-helping-one or a two-against-one dynamic. It's also possible that James decides to talk to his mother, Polly, which creates a different triangle.

Families are filled with relationship triangles. We could describe Ralph and James as parents and Shell and Polly as their daughters just as easily. These triangles are always being created and defined within a family unit when there is instability between two people. During times of crisis, these triangles take on a solution to the instability in the two-person relationship. Unfortunately, this "solution" is either two-helping-one or a two-against-one.⁴¹ Basically, in a triangle, there are now two people on one side and one on the other, so it gives a sense of balance. The more family members we start to examine, the more complicated these triangle structures can become.

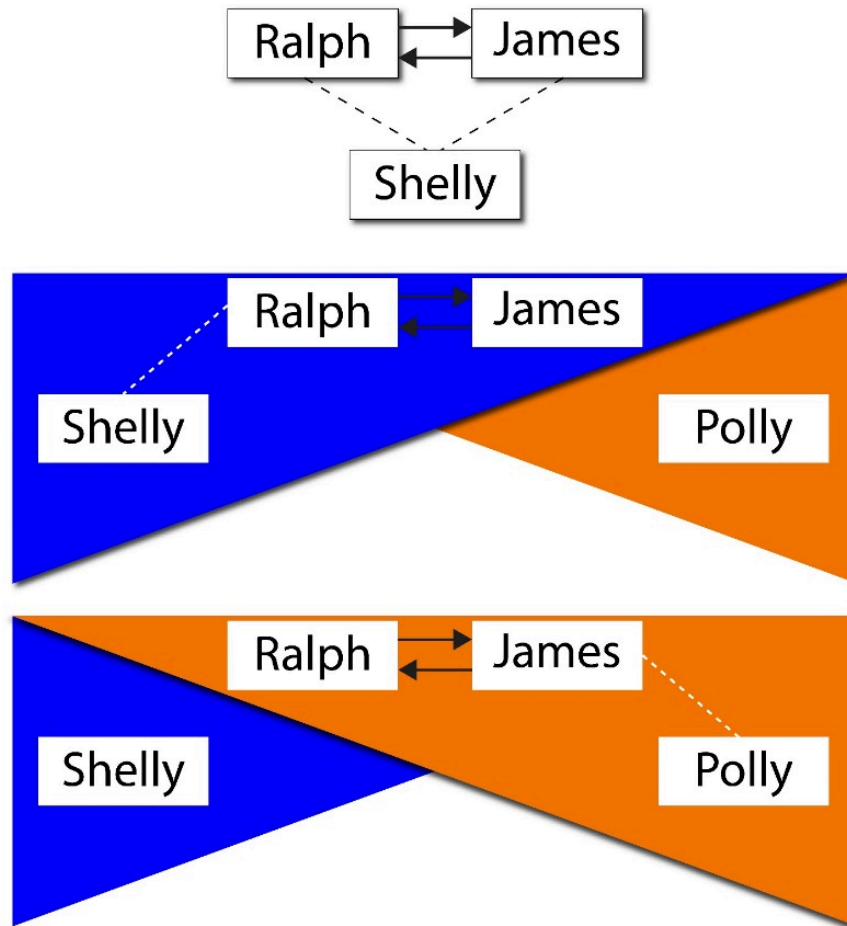


Figure 11.3. Nature of Three

Equifinality

The final characteristic of family systems is equifinality. Equifinality is defined as the ability to get to the same end result using multiple starting points and paths. Going back to the basic definition of “family” discussed earlier in this chapter, there are many different ways for people to form relationships that are called families. Within family systems theory, the goal is to see how different family systems achieve the same outcomes (whether positive or negative).

Mindfulness Activity

Research has demonstrated that parental mindfulness has an indirect impact on children's internalizing or externalizing of problems.⁴² As such, mindful parenting is an extremely useful tool when raising children (specifically being attentive, non-judgmental, and non-reactive). Furthermore, Jill Suttie recommends three specific factors for successful mindful parenting:



1. Noticing your own feelings when you're in conflict with your child,
2. Learning to pause before responding in anger,
3. Listening carefully to a child's viewpoint even when disagreeing with it.⁴³

Myla and Jon Kabat-Zinn define mindful parenting as "Seeing if we can *remember* to bring this kind of attention and openness and wisdom to our moments with our children. It is a true *practice*, its own inner discipline, its own form of meditation."⁴⁴ The essence of mindful parenting is about being present in one's day-to-day interactions with their children. For this activity, answer the following questions. If you are not a parent, think about how your own parents and/or guardians would answer these questions.

1. When you are spending time as a family, are you free from distractions (e.g., cell phones, television, etc.)?
2. Does your family have a clear schedule that creates a stable routine (e.g., family mealtimes, bedtimes for children, etc.)?
3. Does your family engage in "family time" that does not involve technology?
4. How often do you dedicate time to focus purely on your child's needs?
5. When engaging in a conflict with your child, do you remove yourself when you start to get angry (taking a "time out")?
6. How often do you apologize to your child when you're wrong?
7. When watching your children's behavior, do you find yourself observing them or judging them?
8. When was the last time you considered your intentions, judgments, and attitude toward your child during an interaction?

Mapping Family Systems

One of the revolutionary tools created by Murray Bowen to understand complicated family relationships is the genogram. A **genogram** a pictorial representation of a family across generations.

Unlike a traditional family tree, a genogram is designed to detail family data, not just basic demographic information (such as biological sex, birth dates, and death dates). When used effectively, you can track generations of family interactions, medical issues, psychological issues, relationship patterns, and any other variable a researcher or clinician may be interested in studying.⁴⁵

The standard genogram starts with a couple pairing of some kind. In a genogram, males are represented by squares and females are represented by circles. Figure 11.4 is a key for common elements in a genogram. Please understand that this is not an exhaustive list. Researchers often use symbols to highlight specific issues of interest. Furthermore, not all of the symbols below are necessarily agreed upon by all researchers who utilize genograms. As such, it's essential to know the key an individual is using when attempting to understand a genogram.

As you can see in Figure 11.4, your basic genogram enables individuals to examine various characteristics of family members, including types of relationships, relationship interactions, and physical/mental illnesses, as well as other diseases. When thinking about your average family, many people think of the idyllic family represented in Figure 11.5.

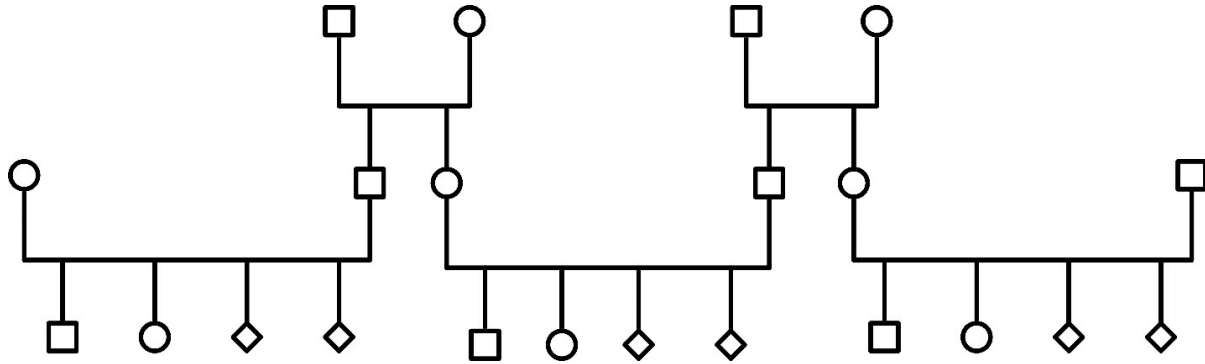


Figure 11.5. Idyllic Family

In this genogram, we have two heterosexual couples, each with a boy and a girl, who then have a boy and a girl of their own (and, of course, one dog and one cat). However, most families don't look like this. Families are complicated and messy.

To help us understand genograms, let's look at your typical family, The Skywalkers (Figure 11.6).

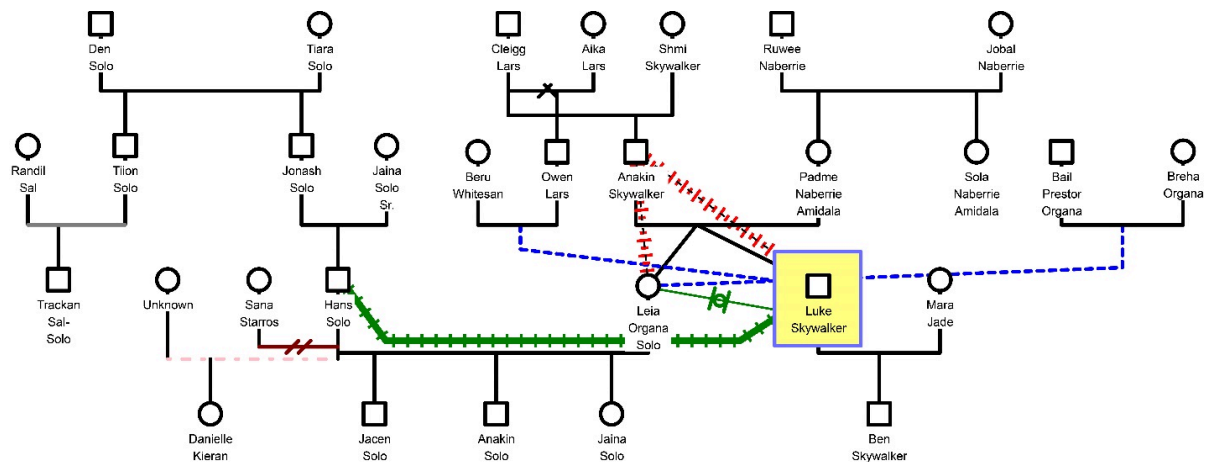


Figure 11.6. The Skywalkers

Geneogram Symbols

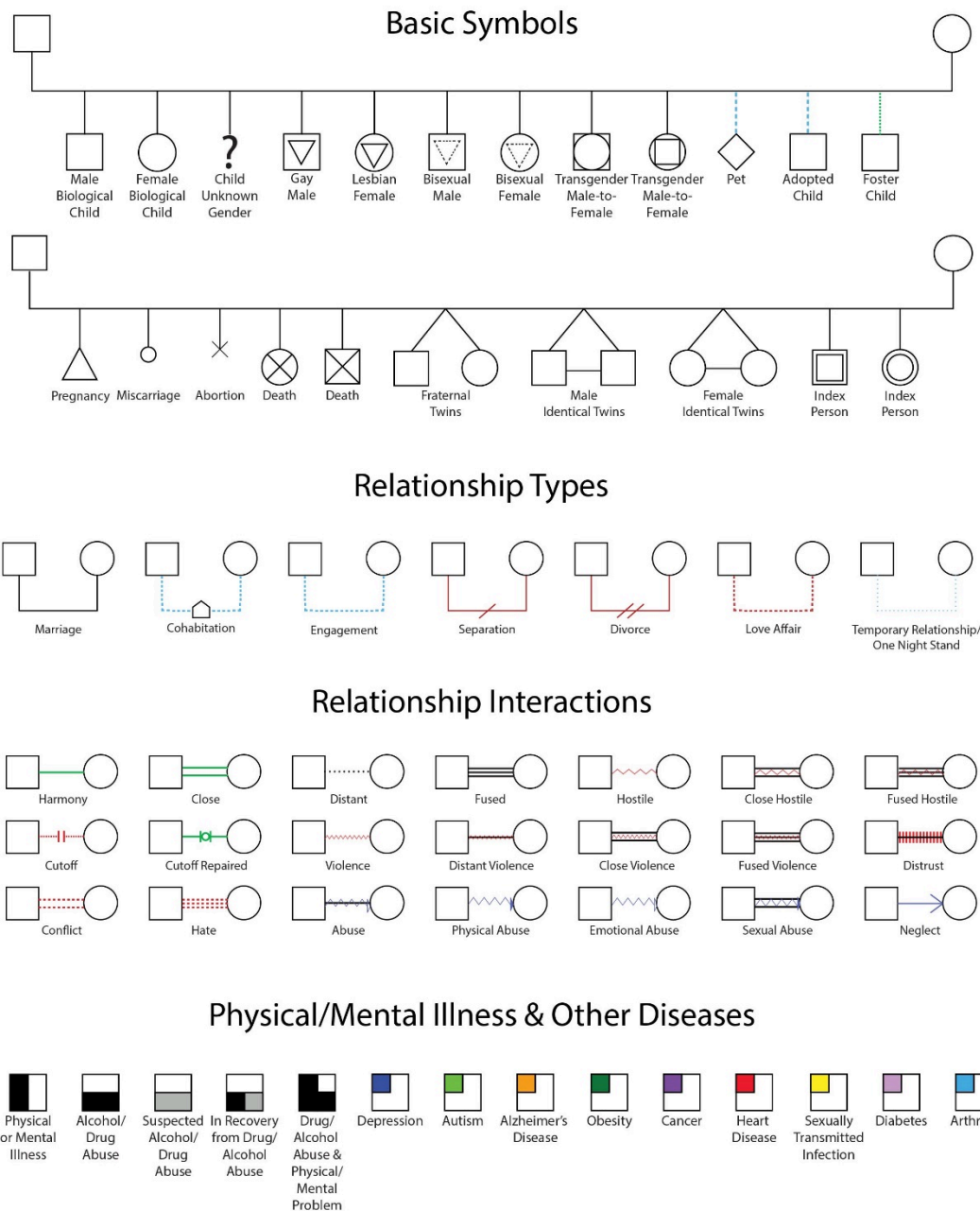


Figure 11.4. Genogram Key

As you can see, there is a great deal of activity in this genogram. We have three general familial lines in play within this genogram: The Solo's (to the left), the Skywalker's (in the middle), and the Naberrie's (to the right). We have four generations represented within this genogram. For our purposes, the "index person" is Luke Skywalker (highlighted in the yellow box). For those who are unaware, the first trilogy of Star Wars centers around Luke Skywalker, making him a suitable person to use as the index for our genogram.

Let's examine some of the family interactions. Let's start with Luke and Leia. They are fraternal twins who were separated by birth. Luke is adopted by his uncle Owen Lars and his wife Beru Whitesan. Leia, on the other hand, is adopted by Bail Prestor Organa and Queen Breha Organa. Ultimately, the two do find each other and establish a close relationship as adults, which is why the "cut off repaired" symbol was used between them. Luke also happens to be best friends with Leia's future husband Hans Solo. Hans has an interesting life before Leia. From what we know, he may have been previously married to Sana Starros (she said they were, he said they weren't). There's also the possibility that Han had an affair with an unknown woman and had a child out of wedlock named Danielle Kieran.

Of course, the bulk of the original trilogy of Star Wars movies centers on the triangle relationship between Luke, Leia, and their father, Anakin Skywalker (also known as Darth Vader). To put it mildly, Vader is a slightly distant father figure and prone to acts of violence. His acts of violence are not only targeted at his children, but also at anyone he perceives to get in his way. During one of his more dramatic acts of violence, Darth Vader destroys the entire planet of Alderaan, which kills Leia's adopted parents in the process. Of course, this is after he gives the order to kill his half-brother Owen and his wife, who were Luke's adopted parents. As we said earlier, families are complicated and messy.

Now, we used the Star Wars world as a tool to help illustrate how genograms can help us break down family histories and understand family dynamics. So, let's look at a genogram from a real family. The following genogram is created without names, but all parts of the genogram represent an actual family (Figure 11.7).

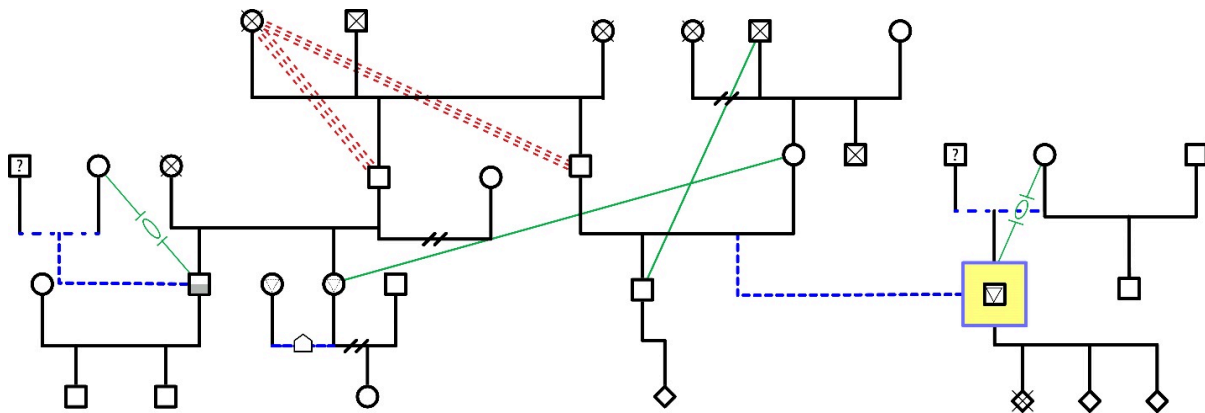


Figure 11.7. Real Family Genogram

Take a moment to examine this genogram. What do you see? How would you characterize this family? You have several close relationships. You have two children who were adopted. Both of whom have repaired the relationships with their birthmothers, but have no apparent connection with their birth fathers. You have single adults with pets. You have three marriages that ended in divorce. For a couple of people, we have no information, which is why we have question marks for two males in the genogram. We have a situation where two male siblings had an intense hatred for their stepmother. We have one gay man who is single and a bisexual woman who is now living with another bisexual woman. We also have one male suspected of alcohol abuse.

We show you this genogram because it's more realistic of how modern families look. Modern family systems aren't always clean and easy to follow. Sure, we could put all these people on a family tree, but you would only get a fraction of the picture of what this family looks like. Genograms are an excellent tool for getting a bird's-eye view of how a family functions.

Research Spotlight



In 2014, Justin Parent, Jessica Clifton, Rex Forehand, Andrew Golub, Megan Reid, and Emily R. Pichler set out to examine the relationships among parental mindfulness, relationship quality, and parental firm control ("degree to which the parent consistently regulates and monitors the child's activities and conduct"⁴⁶). For this specific study, the researchers specifically examined Black children who had a single mother and the mother had a cohabitating male partner (CMP) who lived with them. The average age of the child participants was 13 years old; the average age of the mother was 39; and the average age of the CMP was 41.

First, the research did not find a relationship between a mother's mindfulness and her CMP's mindfulness. For the mothers, mindfulness was positively related to relationship quality, and positively related to parental firm control. For the CMP, mindfulness was positively related to relationship quality, but was not related to parental firm control. We should also mention that mother and CMP relational quality was positively related, and there was a positive relationship between mother and CMP use of parental firm control.

The researchers used family systems theory to help explain the CMP's role within the family system. Specifically, the researchers argue, "It is also important to note that the MCP's role in different family subsystems may be, at least in part, determined by how a mother defines her male partner's role. For example, his main role may be to meet her relationship needs and/or contribute to completing general household responsibilities (e.g, grocery shopping, cleaning) rather than setting limits on an adolescent age child."⁴⁷

Key Takeaways

- The definition of "family" has evolved. While earlier definitions were restrictive and based on legal or biological ties, modern inclusive definitions recognize emotional bonds, chosen families, and diverse family structures.
- Family communication patterns are classified into two dimensions: socio-orientation (valuing conformity and harmony) and concept-orientation (valuing individuality and

open dialogue).

- The intersection of socio- and concept-orientation creates four family types: consensual, protective, pluralistic, and laissez-faire, each with distinct approaches to interaction and decision-making.
- Family systems theory views the family as an interconnected system, where each member affects and is affected by others. It emphasizes the ongoing tension between individuality and togetherness.
- Key concepts from systems theory—like interdependence, patterns, openness, and equifinality—help explain how families function and adapt to change, conflict, and external pressures over time.

Exercises

1. Reflect on your experience as a family member. How does your own family compare to other families in communication patterns and structure?
2. Describe your idea of the ideal family. How would your ideal family communicate? Is this different from your own family?
3. Using conformity orientation and conversation orientation to describe two families you know.
4. Create your genogram for your family, including at least three generations. You can create this using a pen and paper, graphic arts software, or genogram software. The genograms used in this book were created using Genogram Pro, <https://www.genopro.com/>. There is also a pared-down, free version of this software available at: <https://www.genopro.com/free/>.

Family Changes

Learning Objectives

1. Describe each stage in Weaver and Lawton's family life cycle model.
2. Explain how communication patterns may shift during different stages of the family life cycle.
3. Compare traditional family life cycle models with more inclusive models of family

development.

4. Evaluate common criticisms of the family life cycle approach considering contemporary family diversity.

One of the fascinating aspects of studying interpersonal relationships within families is that they are constantly evolving. As the dynamics of a family change, so do the communication networks within it. For example, a family that starts with a pair of committed adults suddenly becomes a group when they either have their first child, foster a child, or adopt a child. With the addition of one other life into the family household, the nature and dynamics change almost overnight.

Family Life Cycle

The notion that families undergo systematic cycles that resemble those of other families is nothing new.⁴⁸ Early research attempted to focus on the differences in families between those that existed in rural and urban settings. One such research, Charles Loomis, broke families down into four general categories:

1. Childless couples of child-bearing age;
2. Families with children under the age of 14;
3. Families with at least one child over the age of 14 but under 36; and
4. Old families.

Other characteristics that Loomis found could impact the family life cycle included the addition of both parents' children and non-parental children (such as nieces and nephews). Of course, the age breakdown shown by Loomis primarily reflected work-related factors. Generally, children under the age of 14 were not considered fully capable of work; whereas, those over the age of 14 were considered work-aged. You'll also notice that stage three is generally viewed as the time when a family has the most working adults within the family unit. At this time, especially in rural America, it was assumed that adult children would stay on the homesteads and assist with the upkeep and day-to-day duties, whether on a farm or ranch. These were multigenerational endeavors. Eventually, a family became "old," and the next generation continued the cycle by having their children to keep the homesteads running.

Of course, our understanding of how families function has evolved significantly since the 1930s. Studying family life cycles has been a consistent endeavor across generations of family scholars. For our purposes, we will discuss the more recent family life cycle, as presented by David Weaver and Laura Lawton, along with some inherent problems associated with this type of research.⁴⁹

Understanding how families function is essential for scholars because it enables us to predict major events in someone's life. For our purposes, we are going to quickly examine David Weaver and Laura Lawton's Family Life Cycle (Figure 11.8).

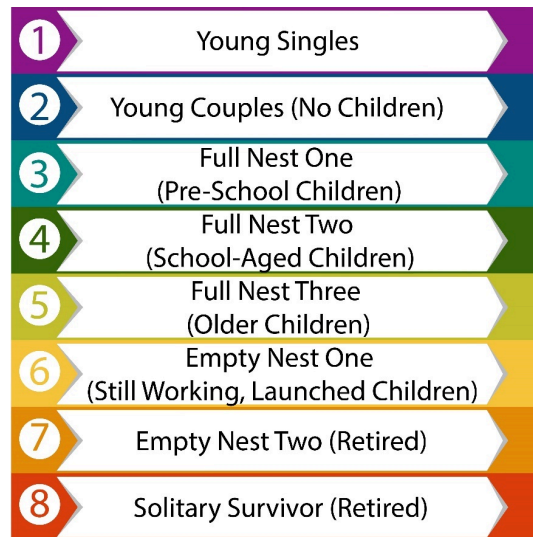


Figure 11.8. Family Life Cycle

Young Singles

The first stage of any family starts when single people enter in the world and start looking for potential partners. Now, most people begin to think about this stage when children are around 18 years of age and enter into the world outside of their parents/guardians' house. They go out looking for potential partners through dating and eventual mating. However, we know that in our modern world, this isn't always the case.

Young Couples (No Children)

Eventually, a couple starts to self-identify as a couple. In today's modern world, we often see the couple stage as one that exists without children. During this time, the couple's focus is often on developing themselves by attending college or starting a career. During this time, some marketers will refer to these couples as "dinks," which stands for dual incomes, no kids. As you can imagine, dinks are often sought out by marketers because they generally have a higher disposable income level compared to those who have children or are just starting.

As couples come together, they enter a period that many family scholars refer to as third-culture building. Each member of the couple brings with them a distinct cultural background and upbringing. The more distinct the cultural differences, the easier it is to identify them. For example, maybe you have a couple where one was raised in the Middle East and the other in South America. These two distinct parts of our world have numerous cultural differences that even outsiders can quickly identify. However, all couples come from different cultural backgrounds, even when the cultures are very similar. For example, you could have a Baptist and a Methodist who were both born and raised in the same town in rural Louisiana. Generally speaking, there may be some minor cultural differences between these two people because of denominational distinctions in their Christian upbringing. Still, these differences aren't huge (though some may overexaggerate them). However, even in cases where people are very similar, cultural differences will still exist that must be addressed as the couple comes together.

When a couple negotiates their cultural background with the cultural background of their partner, they are building a new “**third-culture**.” Sometimes, these cultural differences can be very small. Maybe one member of the couple always opens presents on Christmas Day, and the other member of the couple always opens presents on Christmas Eve. The couple could decide to open one present on Christmas Eve and the rest on Christmas Day. Here, the couple has negotiated their cultural differences to create a new pattern. Other cultural differences can be much larger. In our example of the couple from the Middle East and South America, you could have a couple that has to negotiate the religious upbringing of a child in the Islamic and Roman Catholic faiths. Maybe the couple is atheist, and will not include any kind of religious teaching into the rearing of children, or the couple could opt for some type of combination of both. It’s also entirely possible that one member of the couple will convert to the other member’s religion to ensure religious upbringing in a specific faith.

Ultimately, third-culture building is a unique part of any couple. Some couples will have fairly minor cultural differences to negotiate, while others may have significant cultural differences to overcome. The important part is that this is a negotiation by the couple.

Full Nest One (Pre-School Children)

Once a couple decides to involve children, Weaver and Lawton categorize them into three distinct groups based on the children’s ages. The first stage with children (full nest one) occurs when a couple has pre-school age children. Preschool-age children require more parental oversight. We also see couples with children starting to associate more and more with other couples who also have children, which can lead to changes in a couple’s social network. Other couples may become very dependent on both their nuclear and extended family for child-rearing help. In contrast, others depend on paid help in the forms of nannies or daycare facilities. When the initial couple consists of both dual-income earners, these extended networks become paramount for the couple’s ability to maintain their occupations.

Full Nest Two (School-Aged Children)

In full nest two, the couple has children who are now in school. Once kids go to school, a significant portion of their day is spent in the care of adults outside of their nuclear or extended family. For this reason, the traditional workday tends to be somewhat more flexible for these parents/guardians, but their evenings and weekends are often filled with family functions. As children grow older, parental oversight and direction become less necessary, but children also start taking on their own busy lives and schedules that often conflict with their parents/guardians’ lives and schedules.

Full Nest Three (Older Children)

In full nest three, the couple’s children are older and increasingly independent; however, they are still somewhat dependent on their families for food and shelter. As children increasingly demand their own identities apart from their parents/guardians, parent-child relationships are often fraught with various degrees of conflict. On the one hand, you have parents/guardians who have been in a parental oversight role for many years, and on the other, you have children who are seeking their

independence and autonomy. Finding the balance between these polarizing forces is often easier said than done for many families.

Empty Nest One (Still Working, Launched Children)

The next stage is the empty nest phase, which occurs when children are launched but the parents/guardians are still working. The **launching stage** occurs when late adolescents leave the parental home and venture out into the world as young singles themselves. Historically, late adolescents began the launching stage when they left home and went off to college.

However, it's possible that going to college is only a partial-launch. In today's world, many adolescents go off to college and then after college find it almost impossible to function in many large cities on a single salary, so they end up back and home living with their parents/guardians. Adolescents seek to achieve economic security, but some find it impossible to do so, depending on the state of the economy. For example, we know after the economic downturn of 2008, many recent college graduates had a tough time finding entry-level jobs because they were competing against people with decades of experience who had lost their jobs and desperately needed work (even entry-level work).

Eventually, most parents/guardians will experience a period when their adult children have launched, and the parents/guardians, themselves, are still working.

Empty Nest Two (Retired)

Empty nest two occurs once both parents/guardians have decided to retire. Now, retirement is one of those options that may not be viable for everyone, so some couples never end up in empty nest two as a necessity. Other couples spend almost the last third of their lives in retirement. In many ways, couples in retirement often retain the same flexibility they had when they were young couples.

Solitary Survivor (Retired)

The typical final stage in the family life cycle is when one partner passes away, leaving the other partner on their own. In essence, an individual suddenly finds themselves older and yet again single.

Problems with Life Cycle Research

Probably the most obvious problem with the traditional approach to the family life cycle is that it does not take into account a wide range of differing family possibilities. For example, Elisa Backer noted a wide range of other options that could exist outside of the traditional family cycle:

- Young singles (less than 35 years old)
- Young couples (no children) (female less than 35 years old)
- Gay couple (no children)
- Gay couple (with children)
- Older couple (no children) (female 35+ years of age)
- Older retired couple (no children from current marriage)
- Age-gap couple (children from current relationship; with or without children from previous

relationship)

- Age-gap couple (no children from current relationship; with or without children from previous relationship)
- Older divorced single (no children)
- Single parent (children still at home)
- Older single (never been married, no children) (35+ years old)
- Couple with pre-school children (youngest child not at school)
- Couple with school-aged children (youngest child at school)
- Couple with older children (all children finished school)
- Empty Nest I (still working, children left home)
- Empty Nest II (retired, children left home)
- Widower (widower who is not working and partner is deceased)
- Widower (still working)⁵⁰

Another commonly discussed problem with this approach to understanding the family life cycle is that many individuals do not walk through the family life cycle in an exact sequence. For example, someone could be single, get married, get divorced, get married again, have a child, lose a partner, get remarried, have another child (one child is pre-school age one is recently launched), etc. Suddenly, we've gone from a path that seems highly "normalized" and straightforward to one that contains a lot more uncertainty and diversions from the typical path of "family."

As a whole, family life cycles are an excellent tool for having a general understanding of how many families function within society. Still, many families do not experience the life cycle as a linear process from singlehood to death.

Key Takeaways

- The family life cycle, as outlined by Weaver and Lawton, comprises eight stages, ranging from young singles to solitary survivors. Each stage presents new dynamics that impact family roles, relationships, and communication.
- Communication changes throughout the family life cycle. For instance, couples may shift from negotiating cultural differences in early stages to managing independence and boundaries with adolescent children in later stages.
- Traditional family life cycle models often assume a linear, heteronormative path. Inclusive models acknowledge that families can form, evolve, and change in various ways, including single-parent households, LGBTQ+ families, and multigenerational living arrangements.
- Critics argue that life cycle models are too rigid, failing to account for blended families, remarriages, and non-sequential family experiences. Real-life families often move through these stages in nontraditional or unpredictable ways.

Exercises

1. Use the idea of a family life cycle to map out the cycle of a famous family. You want to choose a family that has completed the full cycle to make this activity easier. Once you've mapped out the family, answer the following questions. Did the life cycle fit this family? How easy was it to identify the various stages of the family life cycle? What critiques would you have of the applicability of the family life cycle approach to this specific family?
2. Think about your own family's life cycle. Attempt to plot out the life cycle of your family through at least three generations: your grandparents (or equivalent), your parents (or equivalent), and yourself and any siblings (or equivalent).

Sibling Types

Learning Objectives

1. Explain the roles of hostility and warmth in sibling relationship research.
2. Differentiate among the four types of sibling relationships identified by McGuire, McHale, and Updegraff.
3. Identify behavioral examples associated with each sibling relationship type.
4. Describe six distinct communication strategies siblings use to maintain their relationships.
5. Assess the impact of relational maintenance strategies on sibling satisfaction and closeness.

After examining the literature related to siblings, Shirley McGuire, Susan M. McHale, and Kimberly Updegraff identified two main concepts commonly discussed in the literature: hostility and warmth.⁵¹ **Sibling hostility** was characterized by such sibling behaviors as causing trouble, getting into fights, teasing/name-calling, taking things without permission, etc.⁵² **Sibling warmth**, on the other hand, was characterized by sibling behaviors such as sharing secrets, helping each other, teaching each other, showing physical affection, sharing possessions, etc...⁵³ Research has shown us that warmth and hostility have an impact on sibling relationships. For example, individuals with higher levels of sibling warmth are more likely to exhibit prosocial behavior.⁵⁴ Individuals who have sibling

relationships that are high in hostility are more likely to report higher levels of aggression, anxiety, depression, and loneliness.⁵⁵

Sibling Relationship Types

McGuire et al. recognized that these two dimensions were distinct from one another, so they sought to create a typology of sibling relationships based on hostility (high vs. low) and warmth (high vs. low).⁵⁶ You can see this typology in Figure 11.9.

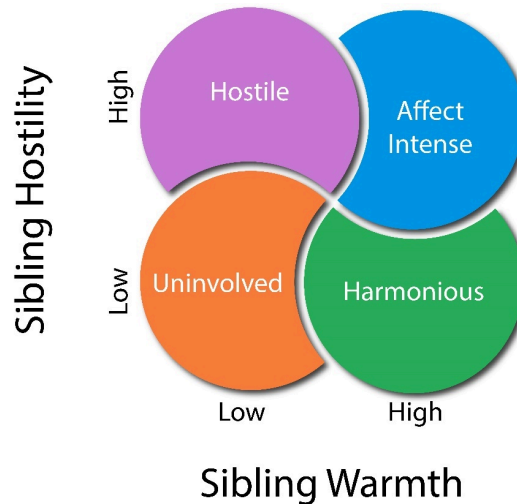


Figure 11.9. Sibling Relationships

Harmonious

The first type of sibling relationship is the harmonious relationship. Harmonious sibling relationships are characterized by low levels of hostility and high levels of warmth. In these relationships, the siblings get along very well and have very low levels of problematic conflict. Often, siblings in this category get along so well that they become very close friends, in addition to being siblings. When it comes to long-term outcomes, harmonious siblings were found to have lower feelings of loneliness and higher self-esteem.⁵⁷ Research has also found gender effects. When sibling pairs are both female, they are more likely to report harmonious relationships than the other three sibling relationship types. At the same time, the combination of gender and birth-order also makes a difference. Males who are the firstborn are less likely to report harmonious sibling relationships.⁵⁸

Hostile

The opposite sibling type of the harmonious sibling is the hostile sibling relationship, which is characterized by high levels of hostility and low levels of warmth. These relationships are characterized by high levels of conflict between siblings, which can often be marked by physical and verbal aggression. Furthermore, individuals in hostile sibling relationships are more likely to internalize problems, along with lower academic success, social competence, and feelings of self-worth.⁵⁹ These

siblings often perceive their siblings as rivals within the family unit, so there is an inherent competition for scarce resources. Often these resources are related to parental attention, respect, and love.

Affect-Intense

The third sibling type is the affect-intense relationship. Affect-intense sibling relationships are marked by both high levels of hostility and warmth. These sibling relationships can be as nurturing as harmonious relationships and as dominating as hostile ones. These relationships are also perceived as more satisfying than hostile sibling relationships.⁶⁰ In one study examining affect-intense sibling relationships, researchers found that 38% of siblings from divorced families reported their sibling relationships as affect-intense as compared to only 22% of siblings from intact families.

Uninvolved

The last type of sibling relationship is called the uninvolved, which is characterized by low levels of both hostility and warmth. Uninvolved sibling relationships rarely exhibit the problems associated with affect-intense or hostile sibling relationships. Still, they also do not report any of the benefits that have been found with harmonious sibling relationships.⁶¹ Uninvolved sibling relationships also appear to develop later in life. “Perhaps the separation processes and increased focus on peers that begin during adolescence stimulate the development of an uninvolved sibling relationship.”⁶²

Sibling Relationship Maintenance

One area where communication scholars have been instrumental in sibling relationships has been in relationship maintenance, or the communicative behaviors that one engages in to preserve a relationship with another person. In one of the earliest studies to examine sibling relationships in the field, Scott Myers and a group of students explored the relationship between relationship communication and sibling communication satisfaction, liking, and loving.⁶³ Equality, receptivity, immediacy, similarity, and composure were all positively related to communication satisfaction. Composure, equality, similarity, and receptivity were all positively related to sibling liking. Equality, similarity, and receptivity were positively related to loving one’s sibling. The researchers also noted that individuals who perceived their relationships as more formal reported lower levels of loving their siblings. This initial study helped pave the way for future research on how relationship communication affects sibling relationships.

In a follow-up study, Scott Myers and Keith Weber aimed to develop a measure for assessing how individuals utilize communication to maintain their sibling relationships.⁶⁴ In their research, Myers and Weber found six distinct ways that siblings maintain their relationships through communication: confirmation, humor, social support, family visits, escape, and verbal aggression.

Confirmation

The first way that siblings engage in relational maintenance is through confirmation. Confirmation messages help siblings communicate how much they value each other. Sometimes it’s as simple

as telling a sibling, “I’m pretty lucky to have a brother/sister like you,” which can be a simple way to demonstrate how much someone means to you. These types of messages help validate the other sibling and the relationship.

Humor

A second relational maintenance tool that siblings can use is humor. Being able to laugh with one’s siblings is a great way to enjoy each other’s company. Often, siblings find things completely hilarious that outsiders may not understand, due to the unique nature of sibling relationships. Siblings can also lovingly make fun of each other. Now, we’re not talking about making fun of someone in a demeaning or mean-spirited manner. For example, one of our coauthors has an older brother who loves to give him a hard time. Recently, our coauthor misspelled something on Facebook, and his brother was right there to point it out and give him a hard time. In some relationships, this could be viewed as criticism, but because of their relationship, our coauthor knew the incident should be taken in jest.

Social Support

The third way siblings engage in relational maintenances is through social support. Social support is an individual’s perception of the actuality that they are loved and cared for, and have people they can turn to when assistance or help is needed. Between siblings, this could involve conversations about one’s romantic life or even about parental concerns. Another way that siblings often provide social support is by giving and seeking advice from their sibling(s).

Family Events

The fourth way that families engage in social support is through family events. Now, not all families are big on family events, but some families participate in close-knit gatherings regularly. Some siblings will avoid these events to avoid seeing their other siblings, but many siblings view these opportunities as a way to maintain their sibling relationships. One of our coauthors’ families has difficulty getting together each year during the holidays due to the busy nature of their schedules in December. Instead, our coauthor and family go on family trips. Over the years, they’ve gone to Australia, Alaska, Hawaii, The Bahamas, San Francisco, New York City, New Zealand, and many other places. Currently, they’re planning trips to Belize and back to Hawaii. The family looks forward to these vacations together. In addition to these trips, our coauthor’s father also arranges periodic family reunions for his side of the family. Once again, our coauthor and sibling often end up rooming together because both are single. Ultimately, both look forward to these reunions because it gives them a chance to catch up.

Escape

At the same time, it’s often great to attend family events, but we usually only like to attend when we know our sibling will be there. In these cases, we often use our siblings as a form of escape. In fact, some siblings will only attend family get-togethers when they know their sibling(s) will be there. We

often have a range of reasons for wanting to escape when interacting with our family, but we're glad our sibling(s) are there when we need that escape.

Verbal Aggression

The final relational maintenance strategy that siblings have been found to use is verbal aggression. Now, verbal aggression is generally not viewed as a positive tool for communication. However, some sibling pairs have come to realize over time that verbally aggressive behavior allows them to get their way or vent their frustrations. However, in the original study by Weber and Myers, the researchers found that all the other relational maintenance strategies were positively related to sibling liking, commitment, and trust, but verbal aggression was not.⁶⁵

Research Spotlight



In 2022, Scott A. Myers investigated how a shared family identity influences the connection between various relationship maintenance behaviors and the perceived quality of relationships among emerging adult siblings.⁶⁶ The study focused on five common relationship maintenance behaviors: positivity, openness, assurances, networks, and tasks. Participants were 132 undergraduate students who reported on their relationships with a chosen sibling.

The key finding revealed that shared family identity significantly moderated the association between the use of openness and perceived relational quality. Still, it did not have this moderating effect for positivity, assurances, networks, or tasks. This means that for emerging adult siblings, expressing thoughts, feelings, and opinions (openness) is more strongly linked to a higher quality relationship when there is also a strong sense of shared family identity. Researchers suggest this might be because openness allows siblings to signify their emotional investment in the relationship, or to recognize the unique importance of their sibling bond within the broader family unit. During emerging adulthood, individuals develop a more sophisticated understanding of the role of their sibling relationships in their lives, and a shared family identity may facilitate a higher comfort level for self-disclosure, leading to an increased perceived relational quality.

Conversely, for the other maintenance behaviors (positivity, assurances, networks, and tasks), shared family identity did not significantly influence their link to relational quality. This suggests that for these behaviors, the overall identification with the family as a unit might not be as relevant in determining relational quality, possibly because emerging adults are more focused on establishing their identities rather than prioritizing their family's collective identity.

Key Takeaways

- Sibling relationships are influenced by two core dimensions: hostility and warmth. Hostility encompasses conflict behaviors, such as fighting or teasing, while warmth encompasses prosocial behaviors, including helping, sharing, or expressing affection.
- Sibling relationships fall into four types. Each type has distinct emotional, behavioral, and developmental outcomes.
 - Harmonious (high warmth, low hostility)
 - Hostile (high hostility, low warmth)
 - Affect-intense (high warmth, high hostility)
 - Uninvolved (low warmth, low hostility).
- Harmonious siblings report higher self-esteem and lower loneliness, while hostile relationships are linked to increased internalizing behaviors and poor academic and social outcomes.
- Siblings maintain their relationships through various strategies, including confirmation (expressing appreciation), humor (shared jokes or playful teasing), social support (emotional or instrumental help), family events (shared gatherings), escape (coping together during stressful events), and verbal aggression (sometimes used for venting).
- Most maintenance strategies have a positive impact on liking, trust, and commitment in sibling relationships, although verbal aggression generally does not.

Exercises

1. Think about your sibling relationships. How would you describe your sibling relationships using the four different sibling relationships discussed by Shirley McGuire, Susan M. McHale, and Kimberly Updegraff? If you don't have siblings, think of a famous pair of siblings. Based on what you know about their relationship, how would you describe their relationship using the four different sibling relationships discussed by Shirley McGuire, Susan M. McHale, and Kimberly Updegraff?
2. Think about your sibling relationships. What relational maintenance strategies discussed by Scott Myers and Keith Weber do you use with your siblings? If you don't have siblings, think of a famous pair of siblings. Based on what you know about their relationship, what relational maintenance strategies do these famous siblings use?

Marriage Relationships

Learning Objectives

1. Describe the relational dimensions of marriage identified by Mary Anne Fitzpatrick.
2. Differentiate among the three types of marital relationships (traditional, independents, and separates).
3. Analyze how the relational dimensions interact to define each type of marriage.
4. Discuss how Fitzpatrick's relational dimensions have been applied to same-sex marriages.
5. Evaluate the gaps in existing research on LGBTQIA2S+ marriages and family communication.

Earlier in this text, we discussed dating and romantic relationships. For this chapter, we will focus on marriages as a factor in family communication. To help us start our conversation of marriage, let's look at some sage wisdom on the subject:

1. "Marriage has no guarantees. If that's what you're looking for, go live with a car battery." — Erma Bombeck
2. "The trouble with some women is that they get all excited about nothing – and then marry him." — Cher
3. "I love being married. It's so great to find that one special person you want to annoy for the rest of your life." — Rita Rudner
4. "By all means, marry. If you get a good wife, you'll become happy; if you get a bad one, you'll become a philosopher." — Socrates
5. "Marriage is an endless sleepover with your favorite weirdo." — Unknown
6. "Many people spend more time in planning the wedding than they do in planning the marriage." — Zig Ziglar

Many writers, comedians, political figures, motivational speakers, and others have all written on the subject of marriage. For our purposes, we will examine marital types and the research associated with the Prepare/ENRICH studies.

Marital Types

One of the most notable scholars in the field of family communication and marital research is Mary Anne Fitzpatrick. Fitzpatrick was one of the first researchers in the field of communication to devote her career to the study of family communication. Most of her earliest research was all in the area of marriage. The culmination of her early research on the subject was the publication of her important book, *Between Husbands and Wives: Communication in Marriage*, in 1988.⁶⁷ Although

this book is over 30 years old now, the information she found and discussed in this book is still highly relevant to our understanding of marital relationships and marital communication.

Relational Dimensions

One of the earliest projects undertaken by Mary Anne Fitzpatrick was the creation of the Relational Dimensions Instrument. The creation of the measure began as part of her dissertation work in 1976.⁶⁸ and was originally fleshed-out in a series of articles.^{69,70} The RDI originally consisted of 200 items based on different ideas expressed in the literature about marriage at the time. Through her research, Fitzpatrick was able to fine-tune the measure to identify eight dimensions of marriage measured by 77 items. These eight dimensions fall into three larger categories: conventional versus nonconventional ideology, interdependence/autonomy, and conflict engagement/avoidance. The RDI can be seen in its entirety in a couple of different locations.^{71,72}

Conventional vs. Nonconventional Ideology

The first large category of relational dimensions is what Fitzpatrick called ideologies. In this category, Fitzpatrick recognized two different types of ideology: traditionalism and uncertainty and change.

Ideology of Traditionalism

The first dimension is referred to as the **ideology of traditionalism**. Traditionalism is the idea that a couple has a very historically grounded and conservative perspective of marriage. For example, couples who see themselves as more traditional are more likely to believe that a wife should take her husband's name when they get married. They are also more likely to believe that the family should adhere to specific religious traditions and that children should be taught those traditions as they grow up. Generally speaking, people with a traditional ideology are more likely to believe in a more rigid understanding of both male and female roles within a marriage. Regarding specific communication issues associated with this ideology, there is a strong belief that families should appear composed and keep their secrets private. In other words, families should strive to maintain appearances and avoid discussing any issues within the family itself.

Ideology of Uncertainty and Change

The underlying idea of the ideology of uncertainty and change is basically the notion that people should be open to uncertainty. "Indeed, the ideal relationship, from this point of view, is one marked by the novel, the spontaneous, or the humorous. Individuals who score highly on this factor appear to be open to change. They believe that each should develop their potential, and that relationships should not constrain an individual in any way."⁷³

Interdependence vs. Autonomy

The second large category of relational dimensions is what Fitzpatrick referred to as the struggle between interdependence and autonomy. In every relationship, as people grow closer, their lives

become more intertwined as they become more interdependent. At the same time, some people prefer a certain amount of individuality and autonomy outside of the relationship itself. “To figure out how connected spouses are, one has to look at the amount of sharing and companionship in the marriage as well as at the couple’s organization of time and space. The more interdependent the couple, the higher the level of companionship, the more time they spend together, and the more they organize their space to promote togetherness and interaction.”⁷⁴

Sharing

The third dimension of marriage relationships is sharing. Sharing consists of two basic components. The first component involves discussing the affective or emotional health of each partner and the relationship while exhibiting nonverbal affective displays (e.g., touching, holding hands in public, etc.). The second component expands across the other dimensions. “A high score on this factor would suggest an open sharing of love and caring, and the tendency to communicate a wide range and intensity of feelings. There is a sharing of both task and leisure activities, as well as a considerable degree of mutual empathy. Finally, these relational partners not only visit with friends but also seek new friends and experiences.”⁷⁵

Autonomy

Autonomy is an individual’s independence in their behavior and thoughts. In a marriage relationship, autonomy can include having a “man cave” or a home office that is specified as “personal” space for one of the marriage partners. Some couples will even go on separate vacations from one another. In any relational dialectic, there is always the struggle between connectedness and autonomy. Different couples will place different degrees of importance on autonomy.

Undifferentiated Space

The fifth dimension of marital relationships is **undifferentiated space**, or the idea that there are few constraints on physical spaces within the home. This undifferentiated space means that spouses do not see their ownership of personal belongings as much as they do ownership as a couple. Furthermore, individuals who score high in undifferentiated space are also more willing to open their homes to family and friends. On the other hand, individuals who have a low sense of undifferentiated space generally view belongings in personal terms. “That’s my room.” “That’s my pen.” “This is my mail.” Etc. These individuals are also more protective of their personal space from outsiders. When they do allow outsiders (e.g., family and friends) into the house, they want to forewarn them that this may happen and that access to certain areas (e.g., office spaces, workshops, master bedrooms, master bathrooms) may be limited.

Temporal Regularity

The next dimension, **temporal regularity**, is how strict a schedule do couples stick to. Do they always get up at the same time? Do they always go to bed at the same time? Do they always eat their meals at the same time? Some marriages run like a well-scheduled train, while others fluctuate temporally on a daily basis.

Conflict Engagement vs. Avoidance

The final broad category of relational dimensions examines how couples handle conflict. Some couples will actively avoid conflict, while others openly engage in conflict.

Conflict Avoidance

The seventh dimension of marital relationships is conflict avoidance. Couples who engage in conflict avoidance do not openly discuss conflicts that arise within their marriage. Individuals who avoid conflict often refrain from expressing their true feelings about topics that could potentially cause conflict. If, and when, they do get angry, they will hide that emotion from their spouse to avoid the conflict.

Assertiveness

The final relational dimension is assertiveness. When analyzing the items on the Relational Dimensions Instrument, Fitzpatrick noticed that two different patterns emerged. First, she observed a pattern of using persuasion or influence to get a partner to do specific things (e.g., watch a TV show, read a book/magazine, etc.). There is a sense of independence and the desire to stand up for oneself even in front of friends. Ultimately, Fitzpatrick believed that “assertiveness” was the best term to capture both phenomena.⁷⁶

The Relational Definitions

After creating the relational dimensions, Fitzpatrick then further broke this down into a marriage typology that included three specific remarriage types: traditional, independents, and separates.^{77,78} Figure 11.10 illustrates how the three relational definitions were ultimately arrived at.

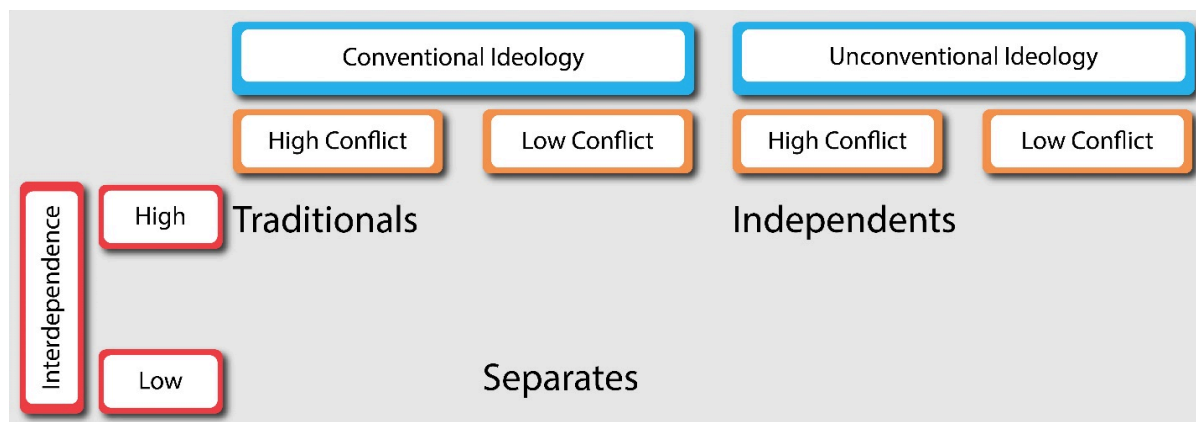


Figure 11.10. Relational Definitions

Traditionals

The first relational definition that Fitzpatrick arrived at was called traditionals. **Traditionals** are highly interdependent, have a conventional ideology, and high levels of conflict engagement. First, traditional lives are highly intertwined in both the use of space and time, so individuals are unlikely to feel the need for autonomous space at home or an overabundance of “me time.” Instead, these

couples prefer to be together and have a high degree of both sharing and companionship. These couples are more likely to have clear routines they are happy with. These couples are traditionalists also because they do have a conventional ideology. As such, they believe that a woman should take her husband's name, keep family plans when made, children should be brought up knowing their cultural heritage, and infidelity is never excusable. Lastly, traditionalists report openly engaging in conflict, but they do not consider themselves overly assertive in their conflict with each other. Of the three types, people in traditional marriages report the greatest levels of satisfaction.

Independents

The second relational definition that Fitzpatrick described were called independents. **Independents** have a high level of interdependence, have an unconventional ideology, and high levels of conflict engagement. The real difference lies in their unconventional views on what a marriage is and how it functions. Independents, like their traditional counterparts, have high levels of interdependency within their marriages, so there is a high degree of both sharing and companionship reported by these individuals. However, independents need more “me time” and autonomous space. Independents are also less likely to adhere to a daily family schedule. To these individuals, marriage is something that complements their way of life, rather than something that constrains it. Lastly, independents are also likely to engage in conflict and report moderate levels of assertiveness, and can actively engage in conflict.

Separates

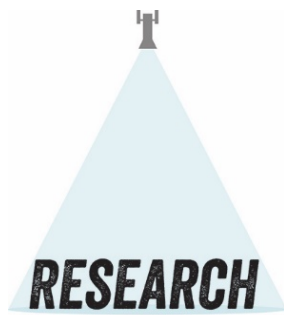
The final relational definition that Fitzpatrick described were called separates. **Separates** have low interdependence, have a conventional ideology, and low levels of conflict engagement. “Separates seem to hold two opposing ideological views on relationships at the same time. Although a separate is as conventional in marital and family issues as a traditional, they simultaneously support the values upheld by independents and stress individual freedom over relational maintenance.”⁷⁹ Ultimately, these couples focus more on maintaining their identities than relational maintenance. Furthermore, these individuals are also likely to report avoiding conflict within the marriage. These individuals generally report the lowest levels of marriage satisfaction.

Same-Sex Marriages

Up to this point, the majority of the information discussed in this section has been based on research explicitly conducted looking at heterosexual marriages. In one study, Fitzpatrick and her colleagues specifically set out to examine the three relational definitions and their pervasiveness among gay and lesbians.⁸⁰ Ultimately, the researchers found “gay males, there are approximately the same proportion of traditionalists, yet significantly fewer independents and more separates than in the random, heterosexual sample. For lesbians, there were significantly more traditionalists, fewer independents, and fewer separates than in the random, heterosexual sample.”⁸¹ However, it's important to note that this specific study was conducted just over 20 years before same-sex marriage became legal in the United States.

The reality is that little research exists thus far on long-term same-sex marriages. The legalization of same-sex marriages in July 2015 started a new period in the examination of same-sex relationships for family and family communication scholars alike.⁸² As a whole, GLBT families, and marriages more specifically, is an under-researched topic. In a 2016 analysis of a decade of research on family and marriage in the most prominent journals on the subject, researchers found that only .02% of articles published during that time period directly related to LGBTQ families.⁸³ For scholars of interpersonal communication, the lack of literature is also problematic. In an analysis of the *Journal of Family Communication*, of the 300+ articles published in that journal since its inception in 2001, only nine articles have examined issues related to LGBTQ families. This is an area that future scholars, maybe even you, will decide to study.

Research Spotlight



In 2023, Amanda M. Pollitt, Karen L. Blair, and Pamela J. Lannutti critically reviewed research published over two decades (2002-2021) in two top relationship science journals, the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* (JSPR) and *Personal Relationships* (PR), to assess the extent of their contribution to LGBTQ+-inclusive relationship science.⁸⁴ Their analysis of 2,181 manuscripts revealed that the overwhelming majority (85.8%) did not acknowledge LGBTQ+ relationships at all. However, there has been some improvement in retaining LGBTQ+ participants in datasets when they are present. The review identified 92 manuscripts (4.2% of the total articles) that specifically contributed to knowledge about LGBTQ+ lives or relationships.

The review highlighted several key themes in LGBTQ+-inclusive research published in these journals. One prominent theme was minority stress, showing that higher levels of stress stemming from stigma and discrimination related to sexual or gender identity are associated with poorer relationship quality, satisfaction, and commitment for LGBTQ+ individuals. Internalized homophobia, or internalizing society's negative views, was detrimental to relationship well-being. However, relationship dynamics like commitment can act as a protective factor, buffering the negative effects of interpersonal stigma on psychological distress.

Another area of focus was relationship preferences, examining how and with whom LGBTQ+ individuals form relationships. Studies found that sexual and gender minority individuals are not necessarily more likely to date across lines of difference, and many expressed an unwillingness to date transgender partners, though openness varied by identity. Regarding friendships, LGBTQ+ individuals form friendships with others similar to them in terms of sex and race, but they are more likely to have cross-sex and cross-race friendships than het-

erosexual people. Bisexual individuals, specifically, were found to be more likely to have heterosexual and bisexual friends but less likely to have gay or lesbian friends.

Social support was identified as a crucial theme, both from partners within relationships and from broader social networks. Research consistently showed that same-sex couples reported better relationship quality due to increased partner support. For LGBTQ+ individuals, friendships, particularly “chosen families” or “voluntary kin,” are essential sources of support, especially when biological family members are unsupportive or rejecting. Sometimes, support from friends was found to be more strongly associated with positive outcomes for those in same-sex relationships compared to support from family. Despite this, same-sex couples often reported lower levels of perceived external support than mixed-sex couples, particularly from family.

The review also addressed commitment and marriage in LGBTQ+ relationships, reflecting the global legal advancements. Early studies found that same-sex couples had similar commitment levels to mixed-sex couples, even before widespread legal recognition. The legalization of same-sex marriage provided opportunities to formalize commitments and communicate them to social networks, though it also brought complex views and concerns about increased anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination. Legalizing same-sex marriage was linked to decreased psychological distress and increased life satisfaction for those who initially experienced higher levels of minority stress.

Finally, research on heterosexism explored attitudes and actions among heterosexual people that affect LGBTQ+ individuals. Studies showed some heterosexuals may be unwilling to form friendships with LGBTQ+ individuals or may view their LGBTQ+ friends less favorably. The concept of “femmephobia,” or the societal devaluation of femininity, was also discussed, showing how it contributes to anti-LGBTQ+ prejudices and negatively impacts the quality of relationships and friendships for cisgender heterosexual individuals by discouraging behaviors like self-disclosure.

Although these journals have contributed to understanding LGBTQ+ relationships, the review concluded that the field of relationships research remains heavily influenced by heteronormativity, with significant gaps remaining, particularly concerning the experiences of bisexual, transgender, and non-binary individuals. Notably, the review found little research in these journals on topics such as relationship violence within LGBTQ+ contexts.

Key Takeaways

- Mary Anne Fitzpatrick developed a framework of marital relational dimensions,

including conventional vs. nonconventional ideology, interdependence vs. autonomy, and conflict engagement vs. avoidance. These dimensions reflect how couples share space, handle conflict, and conceptualize their roles.

- Fitzpatrick identified three marital types: traditionals, independents, & separates. Each type reflects a different approach to married life and satisfaction.
 - Traditionals (high interdependence, conventional ideology, open conflict)
 - Independents (high interdependence, nonconventional ideology, open conflict)
 - Separates (low interdependence, conventional ideology, conflict avoidance)
- Research shows traditionals tend to report the highest marital satisfaction, while separates report the lowest. Independents value individuality and flexibility within a shared life.
- Early studies applying Fitzpatrick's typology to same-sex couples found that gay men and lesbians differed from heterosexual couples in the prevalence of each type. Still, the research was limited and conducted prior to marriage equality.
- LGBTQIA2S+ marriages and families remain significantly under-researched in communication studies. Expanding this area presents an important opportunity for future scholars to gain a deeper understanding of diverse family structures.

Exercises

1. Consider a marital relationship where you are familiar with the couple. Examining the three relational dimensions (conventional/nonconventional ideology, interdependence/autonomy, and conflict engagement/avoidance), how would you categorize this couple? Why?
2. Find a copy of Mary Anne Fitzpatrick's Relational Dimensions Instrument (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232561704_The_instrumental_and_expressive_domains_of_marital_communication), and have a complete the instrument separately. How similar were their responses? How different were their responses?
3. Consider a marital relationship where you are familiar with the couple. Based on what you know about this couple, would you consider them traditional, independents, or separates? Why? Please be specific with your answer to demonstrate your understanding of these three marital types.

Key Terms

autonomy	sibling hostility
concept-orientation	sibling warmth
family	socio-orientation
genogram	system
ideology of traditionalism	temporal regularity
independents	third-culture
individuality	togetherness
launching stage	traditionals
separates	undifferentiated space

Chapter Wrap-Up

At the beginning of this chapter, families are a central part of our lives. Thankfully, several communication scholars have devoted their careers to understanding families. In this chapter, we started by exploring family relationships, focusing specifically on family communication patterns and family systems. Next, we explored the family life cycle. We then discussed the nature of sibling relationships. Last, we ended the chapter by discussing marriage.

Chapter Exercises

Real-World Case Study

Nick and Diane were strangers flying on Continental Flight 05 from London's Gatwick Airport to Houston, TX, when the terrorist attacks on 9-11 struck in the United States. Their plane, along with 38 other wide-body jets, was diverted to Gander International Airport in Newfoundland, Canada. Gander is a city of approximately 10,000 people. What the town lacked in size, the airport made up for in capacity.

Gander International Airport was, at one point, one of the busiest airports in the world because it was the refueling stop for all planes flying from the United States to Europe and from Europe to the United States. In fact, over the years, Gander played host to Winston Churchill, Frank Sinatra, President Ronald Reagan, Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley, and many others had stopovers at the air-

port. However, as airlines transitioned to planes with larger fuel capacities, the need for Gander as a refueling stop gradually faded into the past.

On 9-11, 38 planes, along with 6,122 passengers and 473 flight crew members, suddenly joined the small community. As you can imagine, most cities are not prepared for a population growth of 66% in a matter of hours. Thankfully, the community members of Gander rallied and took care of those passengers and flight crew for four days in what was dubbed Operation Yellow Ribbon.

On the flight, Diane was seated at the front of the plane, while Nick was at the back. The two had never met or even really laid eyes on each other. Both were taken to a place called Gambo, about 20 minutes outside of Gander. At the shelter, the two met in line, waiting to receive blankets. One of them commented on how the blankets smelled, and the two of them just started talking. Nick, sensing the possibility of a new friend, ended up bunking next to Diane in the shelter. The two shared stories and trail mix. Over the next few days, the two started to fall in love.

One night, the two, along with other passengers, went to a local pub where the two became official Newfoundlanders by drinking Screech and kissing a cod. During the midst of the festivities, a local justice of the peace made the mistake of assuming the two were a couple. When he found out they weren't, the justice said, "I can marry the two of you." To which Diane responded, "Sure!" Admittedly, it was probably the Screech talking, but in that moment, Diane realized that she really was starting to like Nick and that she could see him romantically.

After four days, a hurricane was quickly approaching Newfoundland, so there was a short time period to get the planes off the ground once the U.S.'s airspace was reopened. On the bus heading back to the airport, Diane started to tear up, realizing that this side journey in life was coming to an end. Nick leaned in to comfort her and kiss her on the forehead, but Diane took the opportunity to turn it into a more romantic experience.

Nick ultimately proposed to Diane over the phone in November, and the two were married on September 7, 2002. They honeymooned in Newfoundland. Nick and Diane Marson are very much real people. You can even follow them on Twitter, @RealNickandDiane. Their story is actually one of the main plot-points in the award-winning Broadway musical *Come From Away*, which explores the generosity of the people of Gander and the ones who come from away.

1. What do you think it was about this situation that drew the couple together?
2. How would you describe their relationship using the family life cycle?
3. Why do you think Nick and Diane Marson's story has been so captivating to millions of people around the world?

End-of-Chapter Assessment

1. Socio-orientation is characterized by all of the following except _____.
 - a. Harmony
 - b. Similarity of values
 - c. Relatively little communication
 - d. Self-expression
2. Concept-orientation is characterized by all of the following except _____.
 - a. Self-expression

- b. Open communication between parent and child
 - c. Frequent communication between parent and child
 - d. Harmony
- 3. A _____ is a pictorial representation of a family across generations that can be used to track generations of family interactions, medical issues, psychological issues, relationship patterns, and any other variable a researcher or clinician may be interested in studying.
 - a. Family life cycle
 - b. Family system chart
 - c. Genogram
 - d. Genealogy tree
- 4. In which stage of David Weaver and Laura Lawton's Family Life Cycle are adolescents "launched?"
 - a. Full nest two
 - b. Full nest three
 - c. Empty nest one
 - d. Empty nest two
- 5. Which of Mary Anne Fitzpatrick's marital types is marked by being highly interdependent, having conventional ideology, and having high levels of conflict engagement.
 - a. Traditionals
 - b. Independents
 - c. Separates
 - d. Temporals

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Chapter 12: Interpersonal Communication in Mediated Contexts



“People Holding Cellphones” by [fauxels](#) on [Pexels](#)

In today’s world, we all spend a lot of time on various devices designed to make our lives easier and more efficient. 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 is going to examine how technology helps mediate our interpersonal relationships.

Technology and Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Summarize the key historical developments in computer-mediated communication (CMC) from 1801 to the present.
2. Identify major technological milestones that shaped the evolution of the Internet and the World Wide Web.
3. Describe the contributions of influential figures in the development of CMC technologies.
4. Differentiate between asynchronous and synchronous forms of CMC and provide examples of each.
5. Explain how text-based communication tools attempt to compensate for the absence of nonverbal cues.

Since the Internet's creation in 1969, public access to the Internet and the creation of the World Wide Web (www) in 1991, and the proliferation of internet service providers through the late 1990s, the technology that shapes your life today and tomorrow is still relatively new. Here are some relatively recent landmarks in social media sites, technology, and apps: USB drives (2000), iPod (2001), The Tor Project (2002), LinkedIn (2003), Facebook (2004), YouTube (2005), Twitter/X (2006), iPhone (2007), Drop Box (2008), Google Docs (2009), Kickstarter (2010), Amazon Kindle Fire (2011), Google Glass (2012), Oculus Rift (2013), iWatch (2014), YouTube Kids (2015), Douyin—the precursor to TikTok (2016), Face Recognition on phones (2017), PUBG Mobile (2018), Disney+ (2019), Clubhouse (2020), NFTs (Non-Fungible Tokens) Go Mainstream (2021), Generative AI Art (2022), ChatGPT (2023), First NeuroLink—first patient fit with a Brain-Machine Interface (2024), Agentic AI (2025), and who knows what's next. Just limiting this list is hard. Some of these products you're probably very familiar with, while others may be new to you altogether. Some products become instantly famous (like ChatGPT), while others take over a decade. For example, Zoom emerged in 2013 but gained significant popularity only with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

From Math to Punch Cards

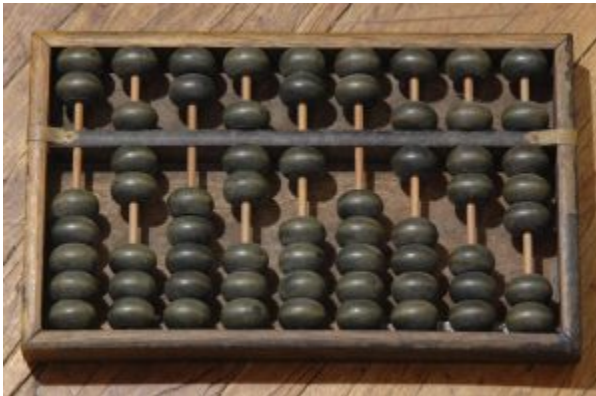


Figure 12.1a A Chinese Abacus.
[“Chinese-abacus.jpg”](#) by Dave Fischer. This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported license.

So, our first question should be, what is a computer? In its earliest use, “computers” referred to people who performed massive amounts of calculations by hand or using tools like an abacus or slide rule (Figure 12.1). As you can imagine, this process wasn’t exactly efficient and required a significant amount of human resources. The 2016 movie *Hidden Figures* tells the true story of a group of African American women who created the calculations that enabled the first astronaut to land on the Moon.

The first mechanical ancestor of the computer we have today was created in 1801 by a Frenchman named Joseph Marie Jacquard, who created a loom that used punched wooden cards to weave fabric (Figure 12.2). The idea of “punch cards” would be the basis of many generations of computers until the 1960s. Of course, the punch cards evolved from wooden cards to cardboard or cardstock throughout their history. Some of the earliest statistical research in communication was conducted using punch cards. Many important individuals contributed to the advancement of the modern computer from the early 1800s to the 1960s. Many wonderful books can introduce you to the full history of how we came to the modern personal computer.^{1 2 3}

The 1970s marked the beginning of the personal computer’s rapid growth. In 1981, IBM released the Acorn, which ran on Microsoft DOS, which was followed up by Apple’s Lisa in 1983, which had a graphic user interface. From that point until now, Microsoft and Apple (specifically, the Macintosh) have dominated the market for personal computers.

Before we get started, it’s essential to understand the evolution of what we call computer-mediated communication or CMC. In recent years, some scholars have adopted the broader term “communication and technology.” Still, we don’t think this is necessary because a computer of some kind is always at the center of these communicative interactions.



Figure 12.1b Slide Rule.
[“slide-rule-computing-device”](#) by Erwin Österreich. This file is licensed under the Pixabay Content License.



Figure 12.2 Jacquard Loom. [“NMS Jacquard loom 2.JPG.” by Ad Meskens](#). This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported license.

Getting Computers to Interact

One thing we’ve observed is that with each new computer development, new technologies have emerged, helping us communicate and interact more effectively. One significant development in 1969 changed the direction of humanity forever. Starting in 1965, researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology could get two computers to “talk” to each other. Of course, it’s one thing to get two computers side-by-side to talk to each other, but could they get computers at a distance to talk to each other (in a manner similar to how people use telephones to communicate at a distance)?

Researchers at both UCLA and Stanford, with grant funding from the U.S. Defense Department’s Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), set out to get computers at a distance to talk to each other. In 1969, UCLA student Charley Kline attempted the first computer-to-computer communication over a distance from his terminal in Los Angeles to a terminal at Stanford. The first message to be sent was to be a simple one, “login.” The letter “l” was sent, then the letter “o,” and then the system crashed. So, the first message ever sent over what would become the Internet was “lo.” An hour later, Kline got the system up and running again, and the full word “login” was sent.

In the earliest years of the Internet, most people were unaware of its existence. The Internet was initially developed primarily as a tool for the Department of Defense, enabling researchers at multiple sites across the country to collaborate on defense projects. It was called the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (**ARPANET**). In 1973, the University College of London (England) and the Royal Radar Establishment (Norway) connected to ARPANET, and the term “Internet” was

born. A year later, in 1974, a commercialized version of ARPANET called Telenet became the first internet service provider (ISP).

Allowing People to Communicate

The early Internet was not exactly designed for the average user, so it required more skill and “know-how” to use and find things. Of course, as the Internet developed, so did its capability to allow people to communicate and interact with one another. In 1971, Ray Tomlinson was working on two programs that could be used over ARPANET: SNDMSG and READMAIL. From his lab at MIT, Tomlinson sent a message from one computer to another computer sitting right next to it, but he sent the message through ARPANET, creating the first electronic email. Tomlinson also forever changed our lives by introducing the “@” symbol as the tool the Internet uses when handling sending and receiving of messages.

In addition to email, another breakthrough in computer-mediated communication was the development of Internet forums or **message/bulletin boards**, which were online discussion sites where people can hold conversations in the form of posted messages. Steve Walker created an early message system for ARPANET. The primary message list for professionals was MsgGroup. The number one unofficial message list was SF-Lovers, a science fiction list. As you can see, from the earliest days of the Internet, people have been using it as a tool to communicate and interact with others who share similar interests.

One early realization about email and message boards is that people relied solely on text to interpret a message with no form of nonverbal communication attached. 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, 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,” explained Fahlman. “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 After giving some thought to the problem, he posted the following message seen in Figure 12.3.

Thus, the **emoticon** (emotion icon) was born. An emoticon was a series of characters and/or letters designed to help readers interpret a writer’s intended feelings and/or tone. Over the years, many emoticons were created some useful 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.

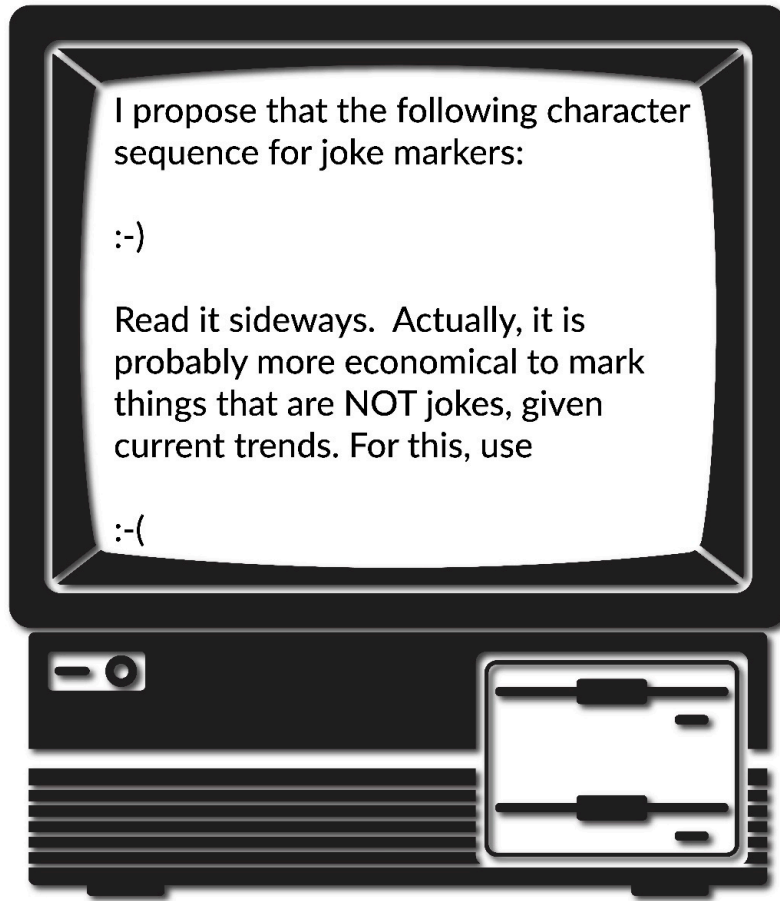
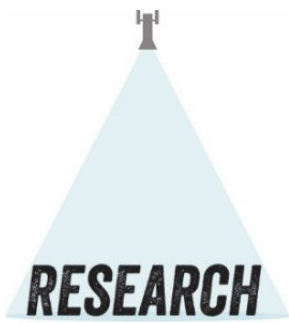


Figure 12.3 Emoticon Email

Research Spotlight



The Use of Emoticons Among Youths

The use of emoticons is ubiquitous in online settings though how emoticons are used may vary by individual, groups of individuals, and even between generations. Researchers Ju and Zhao (2024) explored the impact of emoticons on the social interaction of youths.⁵

Emoticons affect youth social interactions in three ways.

1. Emoticons make up for the lack of context in virtual situations and make corrections for ambiguity of words and phrases created by the absence of nonverbal cues..
2. Young people create online emoticon communities that strengthen their online interactions and help form a deeper social identity. The strength of this identity is so strong that it creates a divide between the online identity and IRL identity.
3. Emoticons are prolific in young people's online social interactions. This presence

bleeds into reality to affect their in-person interactions. For example, one participant reported mimicking the micro expressions of the emoticon when interacting with another person. which has gradually extended from the Internet to reality and now affects their normal, in-person social interactions.

The authors conclude that emoticons will never replace nonverbal cues found in real social interactions, but emoticons have become an important addition to social bonding and emotional communication of teenagers.

Asynchronous Communication

For our part, these technologies are what we call **asynchronous**, or a mediated form of communication in which the sender and receiver are not concurrently engaged in communication. When Person A sends a message, Person B did not need to be on the computer at the same time to receive the message. There could be a delay of hours or even days before that message received and Person B responded. Here, asynchronous messages were akin to letter writing. As the Internet grew and speed and infrastructure became more established, the development of synchronous CMC evolved, enabling mediated communication where the sender and receiver are concurrently engaged in real-time communication. When Person A sends a message, Person B receives it in real-time, just as they would in a face-to-face (FtF) interaction. Here, synchronous messages are akin to talking to someone on the telephone.

Synchronous Communication

Let's switch gears for a bit and talk about the history of **synchronous** communication on the Internet. The first synchronous mode of communication was the chat room. In 1988, Jarkko "WiZ" Oikarinen wrote the first Internet Relay Chat (IRC) client and server at the University of Oulu, Finland. IRC was initially started as a program to replace an existing BBS, but WiZ realized that he had something completely different. With IRC, individuals from around the world could log in using an IRC Chat Client (software on their computer), which would allow them to access a server elsewhere in the world to interact with people in real-time. The invention of IRC led to the proliferation of chat rooms throughout the 1980s and 90s.

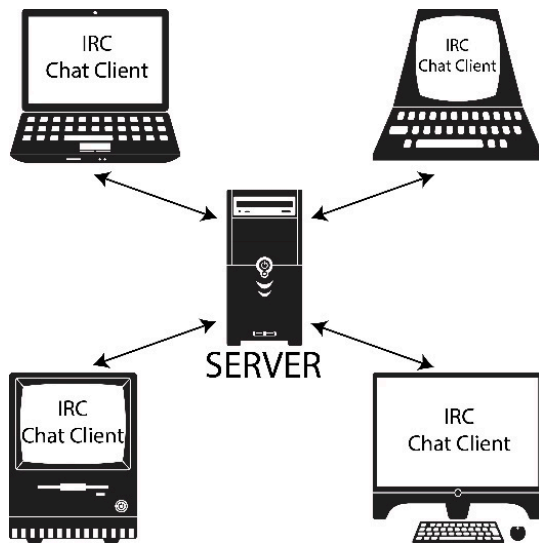


Figure 12.4 Internet Relay Chat

time: 160 characters (letters, numbers, or symbols in the Latin alphabet). If you haven't figured it out yet, the system created by Hillebrand and Ghillebaert is the system most of you use every day to send text messages. Now, texting can be asynchronous or synchronous, but we decided to discuss it here because it falls within the timeline we're developing, and it's often used for people to communicate with one another in real-time.

In addition to IRC, another technology developed through Germany and France cooperation on Groupe Speciale Mobile (GSM) came out in February 1985 in Oslo, Norway. The goal of the GSM was to develop protocols for second-generation global cellular phone networks. One technology that was created was called the **short messaging service (SMS)**. The concept was developed in 1985 by Friedhelm Hillebrand and Bernard Ghillebaert. SMS originated from radio telegraphy in radio memo pagers using standardized phone protocols and later defined as part of the Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) series of standards in 1985. The "short" part of SMS refers to the maximum size of the messages that could be sent at the

The World Wide Web

Our last major invention, which was indeed groundbreaking, came about in 1990. Tim Berners-Lee, a scientist working for Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire (CERN), had an idea to help capture information from the people who worked at CERN. At CERN, the typical length of someone conducting research there was only two years, so that meant a lot of new people coming and going without a way to capture what was being done. As Lee noted, "The actual observed working structure of the organisation is a multiply connected 'Web' whose interconnections evolve with time."⁶ Unfortunately, people come and go, and those interconnections often get lost. Furthermore, "The technical details of past projects are sometimes lost forever, or only recovered after a detective investigation in an emergency. Often, the information has been recorded, it just cannot be found."⁷ You see, Berners-Lee realized that so much information is learned on the job and then leaves with the people as they leave the job. Berners-Lee proposed a new system for keeping electronic information based on hypertext. After getting some initial positive feedback, Berners-Lee and Robert Cailliau wrote a management report explaining hypertext, "HyperText is a way to link and access information of various kinds as a Web of nodes in which the user can browse at will. It provides a single user interface to large classes of information (reports, notes, data bases, computer documentation, and online help). We propose a simple scheme incorporating servers already available at CERN... A program which provides access to the hypertext world we call a browser..."⁸ The title of this report was "WorldWideWeb: Proposal for a HyperText Project."

CERN was not really concerned with the Internet as its primary scope and emphasis, so they agreed to release the source code for World Wide Web (WWW) to the world in April 1993. By 1994, Berners-Lee left CERN and took a job at MIT, where he created the International World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) to develop common standards for communication on the WWW. W3C still exists today, and the WWW celebrated its 30th birthday on March 10, 2019. The 5th variation of the hypertext markup language (HTML) created by the W3C is currently in circulation. You're probably using HTML5 daily and don't even realize it. As the W3C note, "HTML5 contains powerful capabilities for Web-based applications with more powerful interaction, video support, graphics, more styling effects, and a full set of APIs. HTML5 adapts to any device, whether desktop, mobile, tablet, or television."⁹

Key Takeaways

- Computer-mediated communication (CMC) has evolved from mechanical devices, such as the abacus and punch card systems, to the sophisticated web-based platforms we use today. The timeline includes key inventions, including the Jacquard loom, early personal computers, and the Internet.
- Key milestones in the development of CMC include the creation of ARPANET, the rise of ISPs, the invention of email and emoticons, the development of chatrooms and text messaging, and the launch of the World Wide Web in 1991.
- Important contributors to CMC include Joseph Marie Jacquard (mechanical computing), Ray Tomlinson (email), Scott Fahlman (emoticons), Jarkko Oikarinen (IRC), Friedhelm Hillebrand and Bernard Ghillebaert (SMS), and Tim Berners-Lee (WWW).
- Asynchronous CMC, such as email and message boards, does not require simultaneous interaction, whereas synchronous CMC, including chatrooms and real-time texting, allows for immediate communication between users.
- Emoticons and other textual cues were developed to help convey tone and emotion in digital communication, compensating for the lack of facial expressions, gestures, and vocal cues.

Exercises

1. When you look back at your own life, which computer-mediated technologies do you remember interacting with? Go back as far as you can and reflect on your first experiences, from what you used then to what you use today.
2. Check out the World Wide Web Consortium's (W3C) website (<https://www.w3.org/>)

- and see what projects they're working on today. Why is the W3C still relevant today?
3. Consider the use of emoticons in CMC. Think of a message exchanges where the use of emoticons increased clarity. Think of message exchanges where emoticons were not used and communication was misinterpreted. What would emoticons might have helped with the misinterpretation? Would emoticons have helped at all?

The CMC Process

Learning Objectives

1. Differentiate between synchronous, asynchronous, and hybrid forms of computer-mediated communication.
2. Explain how the absence or reduction of nonverbal cues affects message interpretation in CMC.
3. Describe the conventions, expectations, and norms that shape digital communication behavior (netiquette).
4. Identify key human communication variables that influence behavior in CMC environments (e.g., communication apprehension, competence).
5. Analyze how people form impressions and manage identities in mediated contexts.

As interpersonal communication scholars, our interest in CMC is less about the technologies people use and more about how they utilize technology to interact with one another. Instead of focusing on how one goes about coding new software, scholars of interpersonal communication focus on how new technologies and software help facilitate interpersonal communication. For example, Pat and Sam are playing the latest Massive Multiplayer Online Roleplaying Game (e.g., Word of WarCraft, Fortnite, etc.). As you can see in Figure 12.5, each player is playing the same video game together but from different locations. Through a technology called VoIP, Sam and Pat can play video games simultaneously while talking to each other using headsets.

Synchronous and Asynchronous Communication

In this section, we're going to delve further into the areas of synchronous and asynchronous communication. In Figure 12.5, Sam and Pat are in some underworld, fiery landscape. Pat is playing a witch, and Sam is playing a vampire. The two can coordinate their movements to accomplish in-game tasks because they can



Figure 12.5 Video Game Play

freely talk to one another while playing the game in real-time. As previously discussed, this type of CMC involves synchronous communication, which occurs in real-time. Conversely, asynchronous communication is the exchange of messages with a time lag. People can communicate on their schedules as time permits, rather than in real-time. For example, Figure 12.6 shows a conversation between two college students. Here, two college students are using SMS, commonly called texting) to interact with each other. The conversation starts at 2:25 PM. The first person starts 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, online discussions, etc.

Now, is it possible for people to use the same SMS technology to interact synchronously? Of course. One of our coauthors remembers two students on a trip sitting next to each other texting back-and-forth because they didn't want their conversation to be overheard by others in the van. Their interaction was clearly mediated, and in real-time, so it would be considered synchronous communication.

Nonverbal Cues

One interpersonal consideration related to CMC is nonverbal communication. Historically, mediums people used to interact with one another were asynchronous and text-based. As such, it was impossible to fully ascertain the meaning behind a string of words fully. Mary J. Culnan and M. Lynne Markus believed that the functions nonverbal behaviors meet in interpersonal interactions simply go unmet in CMC.¹⁰ As such, 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 FtF interaction,
2. Different media filter out or transmit different cues, and
3. Substituting technology-mediated for FtF communication will result in predictable changes in intrapersonal and interpersonal variables.¹¹

Let's breakdown these assumptions. First, CMC interactions "filter out" communicative cues found in FtF interactions. For example, if you're on the telephone with someone, you can't see their eye contact, 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. That's what is meant by nonverbal cues that have been filtered out. For now, we will pause our discussion about nonverbal communication, as we will revisit this information later in the chapter when we examine a range of theories related to CMC.

Unfortunately, even if we don't have the nonverbals to help us interpret a message, we interpret the message using our perceptions 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.

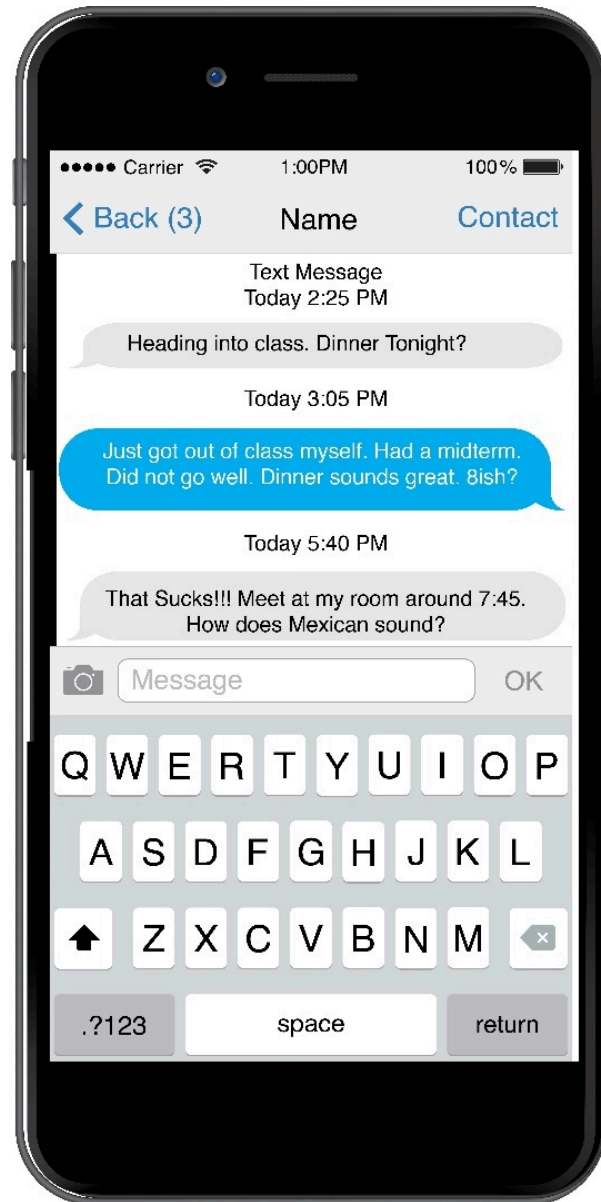


Figure 12.6 Asynchronous Communication via SMS (Text Messaging)

CMC Rules and Norms

As with any form of communication, certain rules and norms govern how people interact with one another. For example, X had an extensive Terms of Service policy that covered a wide range of communication rules called The X Rules. For our purposes here, let's examine their rules related to hate speech and violence:

Violent Content: You may share graphic media if it is properly labeled, not prominently displayed and is not excessively gory or depicting sexual violence, but explicitly threatening, inciting, glorifying, or expressing desire for violence is not allowed

Violent & Hateful Entities: You can't affiliate with or promote the activities of violent and hateful entities.

Child Safety: We have zero tolerance for any forms of child sexual exploitation and remove certain media depicting physical child abuse to prevent the normalization of violence against children.

Abuse/Harassment: You may not share abusive content, engage in the targeted harassment of someone, or incite other people to do so.

Hateful conduct: You may not attack other people on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, caste, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, religious affiliation, age, disability, or serious disease.

Perpetrators of Violent Attacks: We will remove any accounts maintained by individual perpetrators of terrorist, violent extremist, or mass violent attacks, and may also remove posts disseminating manifestos or other content produced by perpetrators.

Suicide: You may not promote or encourage suicide or self-harm.

Adult Content: You may share consensually produced and distributed adult nudity or sexual behavior, provided it's properly labeled and not prominently displayed.

Illegal or Certain Regulated Goods or Services: You may not use our service for any unlawful purpose or in furtherance of illegal activities. This includes selling, buying, or facilitating transactions in illegal goods or services, as well as certain types of regulated goods or services.¹²

These statements are clear examples of rules that exist on the X platform. Of course, some have argued that this rule is quite flexible, given the type of hateful political speech often tweeted by various political figures. Furthermore, there has been a consistent debate over what constitutes free speech and what constitutes hate speech on the platform since Elon Musk took over in 2022.

Besides clearly spelled-out rules that govern how people communicate via different technologies, there are also norms for how people interact and communicate. A norm, in this context, refers to an accepted standard for how individuals communicate and interact with others in the CMC environment. For example, one norm that can really frustrate people in text-based CMC environments is yelling, or TYPING IN ALL CAPITAL LETTERS. There's actually not a consensus on when the avoidance of all capital letters as a tool for yelling first happened. We do know that newspapers

in the 1880s often used all capital letters to emphasize headlines (basically have them jump off the page). At some point in the early 1980s, using all caps as a form of yelling became quite the norm, which was noted in a message post from Dave Decot in 1984 (Figure 12. 7).¹³

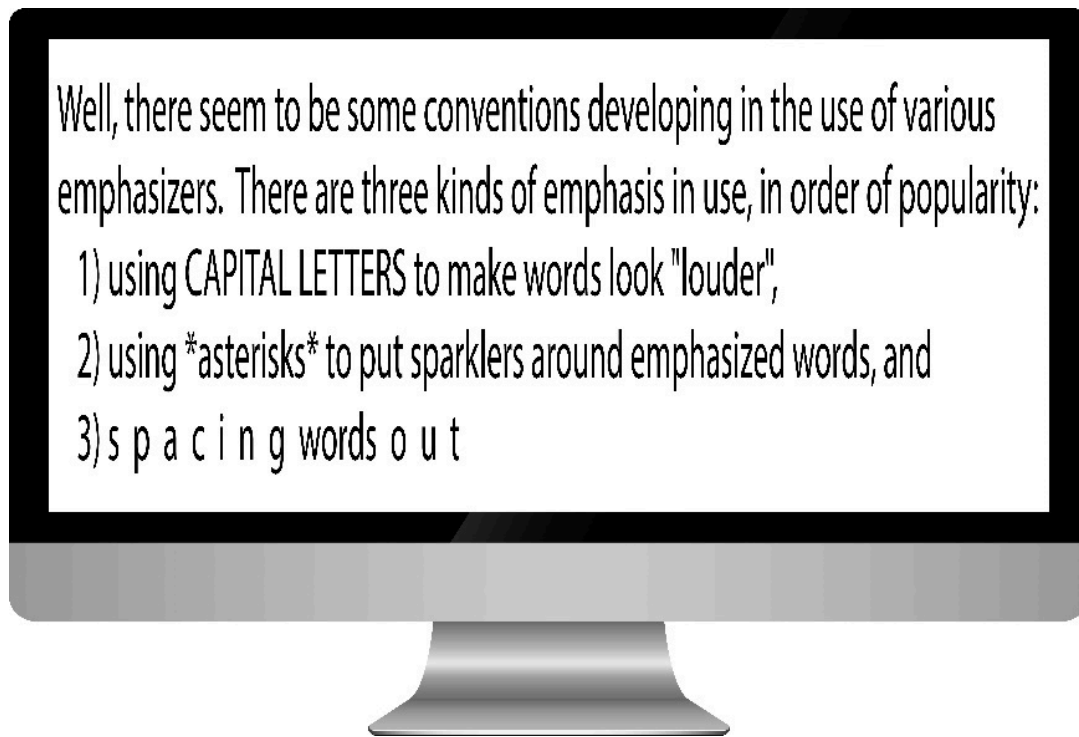


Figure 12.7 The Creation of YELLING

In this example, you see three different attempts to create a system for emphasizing words. The first is the use of all capital letters for making words seem “louder,” which eventually became known as yelling.

Netiquette

Over the years, numerous norms have been established to facilitate effective communication 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 acceptable and polite when interacting with another person(s) through mediated technologies. Let’s break down this definition.

Research Spotlight



In a 2019 study conducted by Jale Ataşalar and Aikaterini Michou, the researchers set out to examine whether mindfulness related to problematic Internet use (i.e., Internet addiction).¹⁴ This study was conducted in Ankara, Turkey, and examined 165 Turkish early adolescents (mean age was 13).

To examine mindfulness, the researchers revised the [Mindful Attention Awareness Scale](#) created by Kirk Brown and Richard Ryan.¹⁵ The revised measure sought to examine the degree to which individuals engaged in mindful behaviors while online.

Overall, the researchers found that people who were mindful online were less likely to report engaging in problematic Internet use.

Contexts

First, we wanted to ensure that our definition 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 the same fashion. Furthermore, it may be entirely appropriate to downplay or not worry about spelling errors or grammatical problems in a text you send to a friend. Still, 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 face with young employees fresh out of college is that they struggle to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate communication behavior in various 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. We mention this because the context is different from your day-to-day use of email. 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.
- Have a Proper Greeting (Dear Mr. X, Professor Y:, etc.)
- Double-check your Grammar.
- Correct any spelling mistakes.
- Include only essential information.
- Your message should be concise.

- Make your intention known clearly and directly.
- Make sure your message follows a logical organization.
- Be polite and ensure your tone is appropriate.
- Avoid all CAPS or all lowercase letters.
- Avoid “textspeak” (e.g., plz, lol, etc.)
- If you want the recipient to do something, make the desired action very clear.
- Have a clear 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 & Norms

Second, in our definition, netiquette is a combination of both rules and norms. Part of being a competent communicator in a CMC environment is understanding the rules. For example, if you know that X’s rules ban hate speech, then engaging in hate speech on the platform shows a disregard for the rules and is not appropriate behavior. Hate speech is anti-netiquette. We also do not want to ignore the fact that norms often develop in different CMC contexts. For example, perhaps you’re taking an online course that requires you to participate in weekly discussions. One common norm in an online class is to review the previous replies to a post before posting your own response. If you don’t, then it’s like jumping into a conversation that’s already occurred and throwing your two-cents in without knowing what’s happening.

Acceptable & Polite CMC Behavior

Third, we believe that 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 seen as yelling? Being polite is merely showing others respect and demonstrating socially appropriate behavior.

Mindfulness Activity

If you’ve spent any time online recently, you may have noticed that it can definitely feel like a cesspool. There are so many trolls that the Internet has become a place where genuine interactions are hard to come by. Mitch Abblett came up with five specific guidelines for interacting with others online:

1. Be kind and compassionate in all your 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 out mental health advice.
5. Respect everyone's privacy and be thoughtful in the nature and depth of one's sharing.¹⁶

Think about your interactions with others in the online world. Have you ever communicated with others without considering attention, intention, and attitude?

Online Interaction

Judge “I am not a cat.” Attorney Rod Ponton delighted the world when he showed up as a cat in a Zoom court hearing. Inside Edition covered the cat filter faux pas in their story “Lawyer Behind Cat Filter Explains What Happened on Zoom”

See the story at <https://youtu.be/iEdBUenYYdk?si=cHEqV0QIa9AYGhxz>



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://milnepublishing.geneseo.edu/interpersonal-communication-2nd/?p=144#oembed-1>

Fourth, our definition involves interacting with others. Now, 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 for interpersonal communication. Examples include sending a text to one person, sending an email to one person, or talking to one person via Zoom, among others. A one-to-many relationship is also a possibility and will require its own set of rules and norms. Some common examples of 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 of one-to-many involve the same technologies used for one-on-one communication. With one-to-many, we’re dealing with a larger number of people involved in the communicative interactions.

Range of Mediated Technologies

Last, netiquette can vary based on the different mediated technologies. For example, it may be considered entirely appropriate for you to scream, yell, and curse when you’re playing with your best friend on Fortnite. Still, it wouldn’t be appropriate to use the same communicative behaviors when engaging in a video conference over Skype. Both technologies utilize VoIP to some extent, but the platforms and contexts are very different, so they require different types of communicative behavior.

Some differences in netiquette will exist 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).

Ultimately, engaging in netiquette requires learning what is considered acceptable and polite behavior across various technologies.

Communication Factors

Communication traits are a crucial aspect of understanding how computer-mediated communication affects interpersonal relationships. In order to understand why people communicate the way they do online, we need to realize how certain traits impact how people interact on computer-mediated platforms. In this section, we will examine two specific communication factors that have been researched in various CMC contexts: communication apprehension and self-disclosure.

Communication Apprehension

Most research examining CA and CMC began at the start of the 21st Century. Until 1996, when America Online (AOL) offered unlimited Internet access for a low monthly fee, most people lacked access to the Internet because of its high cost. As such, most scholars weren't overly interested in communication traits related to CMC until the public became more actively involved interacting through the technology. One early study conducted by Scott W. Campbell and Michael R. Neer sought to see if an individual's level of communication apprehension (CA) could predict how they felt about CMC.¹⁷ In the study, the authors predicted that an individual's level of CA could predict whether individuals believed CMC was an effective medium for interpersonal communication; however, the researchers did not find a significant relationship. The researchers found that there wasn't a significant relationship between CA and people's satisfaction with their CMC experiences. Here's how the researchers attempted to make sense of these findings:

One plausible interpretation is that high apprehensives simply do not view CMC positively or negatively. Yet, they recognize that it reduces the threat posed to them in FtF settings. An equally plausible explanation is that high apprehensives do not regard CMC as an interpersonal obstacle to overcome because it is not FtF, but a substitute that fails to challenge or override their apprehension level.¹⁸

Jason S. Wrench and Narissra M. Punyanunt-Carter furthered the inquiry into CA and CMC by examining how people responded to various types of CMC. Specifically, Wrench and Punyanunt-Carter were interested in examining email CA, online chatting CA, and instant messaging CA. You can see the Computer-Mediated Communication Apprehension Scale that Wrench and Punyanunt-Carter below.¹⁹ It's important to emphasize that the technologies listed here were the primary ones people used when this study was conducted in the mid-2000s.

Computer-Mediated Communication Apprehension Scale

Instructions: This set of questions asks you about how you feel while communicating using email.¹ If you have never used email, please leave this section blank. Work quickly and indicate your first impression. Please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you by marking whether you:

Never True	Rarely True	Sometimes True	Often True	Almost Always True
1	2	3	4	5

_____1. When communicating using email, I feel tense.

_____2. When communicating using email, I feel calm.

_____3. When communicating using email, I feel jittery.

_____4. When communicating using email, I feel nervous.

_____5. When communicating using email, I feel relaxed.

Scoring:

To compute your scores follow the instructions below:

12 – (scores for items 2 & 5) + scores for items (1, 3, and 4)

CMCA Score: _____

Interpretation:

Scores on all three measures should be between 5 and 25. Scores over 9.5 are generally considered high.

Source:

Wrench, J. S., & Punyanunt-Carter, N. M. (2007). The relationship between computer-mediated-communication competence, apprehension, self-efficacy, perceived confidence, and social presence. *Southern Journal of Communication*, 72(4), 355–378. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10417940701667696>

¹ In the original study, we also asked participants to evaluate their communication in two additional contexts: chat room, IRC, or MUDD and Internet messaging program. This measure can be easily modified to evaluate CMCA in any mediated context, ranging from communication with a robot to interaction with artificial intelligence.

Besides CMCA, the authors were also interested in an individual's skill levels with CMC. CMC skill was listed as three distinct concepts: computer efficacy (individuals' confidence in using a computer), Internet efficacy (individuals' confidence in using the Internet), and CMC competence. Brian H. Spitzberg believed that CMC competence consisted of three important factors: 1) people must be motivated to interact with others competently, 2) people must possess specialized knowledge and technical know-how, and 3) people must learn the rules and norms for communicating in the CMC context.²⁰ In the Wrench and Punyanunt-Carter study, the researchers found that CMCA was negatively related to computer efficacy, Internet efficacy, and CMC competence.

In a subsequent study by Daniel Hunt, David Atkin, and Archana Krishnan, the researchers aimed to investigate CMCA and Facebook interactions.²¹ Hunt, Atkin, and Krishan used a revised version of the Wrench and Punyanunt-Carter CMCA scales to measure Facebook CA. Hunt, Atkin, and Krishan found that CMCA decreased one's motivation to use Facebook as a tool for interpersonal communication. These findings were similar to those found by Narissra M. Punyanunt-Carter, J. J. De La Cruz, and Jason S. Wrench, who examined CMCA on the social media app Snapchat.²² In this study, the researchers examined CMCA with regard to satisfying a combination of both functional and entertainment needs. Functional needs were defined as needs that enable an individual to accomplish something (e.g., feeling less lonely, problem-solving, meeting new people, decision-making, etc.). Entertainment needs were defined as needs that allow an individual to keep themselves occupied (e.g., because it's fun, because it's convenient, communicate easily, etc.). In this study, Punyanunt-Carter, De La Cruz, and Wrench found that individuals with high levels of Snapchat CA were more likely to use Snapchat for functional purposes and less likely to use Snapchat for entertainment purposes.

In a second study conducted by Punyanunt-Carter, De La Cruz, and Wrench, the researchers set out to examine social media CA in relation to introversion, social media use, and social media addiction.²³ In this study, the researchers found that social media CA was positively related to introversion, which is in line with previous research examining CA and introversion. Furthermore, introversion was negatively related to social media use, but social media CA was not related to social media use. Lastly, both social media CA and introversion were negatively related to social media addiction. Overall, this shows that individuals with social media CA are just not as likely to use social media, so they're less likely to become addicted.

So, what does all of this tell us? From our analysis of CA and CMC, we've come to the understanding that CMC is a tool for communication. Although people with high levels of CA tend to function better in a CMC environment than in a FtF one, they're still less likely to engage in CMC when compared to those people with low levels of CMCA. People with low levels of CMCA see CMC as another platform for communication.

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 is very important (**impression formation**). How we communicate via social media and the professionalism of our online persona can be a significant determining factor in securing 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 revealed that 70% admit to screening potential employees using social media, and 66% use search engines to research potential employees.²⁴ In fact, having an online persona can actually be very beneficial. Forty-seven 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 potential employers are looking for when they checkout people online. The main things employers look for is 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%).²⁵ According to CareerBuilder.com, here are the common reasons someone doesn't get a job because of their online presence:

- Job candidate posted provocative or inappropriate photographs, videos or information: 40 percent
- Job candidate posted information about them drinking or using drugs: 36 percent
- Job candidate had 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 percent²⁶

As you can see, what you put online says a lot about you as a person to many organizations, so they are checking the Internet to see what exists about you as a person. The flip of this is that what you have online can also help get you hired. In the same study from CareerBuilder.com, it was found that 57% of hiring managers have found information about a candidate online that has solidified their decision to hire that person. Here is a list of what hiring managers found that made them want to hire someone:

- Job candidate's background information supported their professional qualifications for the job: 37 percent
- Job candidate was creative: 34 percent
- Job candidate's site conveyed a professional image: 33 percent
- Job candidate was well-rounded, showed a wide range of interests: 31 percent
- Got a good feel for the job candidate's personality, could see a good fit within the company culture: 31 percent
- Job candidate had great communications skills: 28 percent
- Job candidate received awards and accolades: 26 percent
- Other people posted great references about the job candidate: 23 percent
- Job candidate had interacted with company's social media accounts: 22 percent

- Job candidate posted compelling video or other content: 21 percent
- Job candidate had a large number of followers or subscribers: 18 percent
- ²⁷

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 on you. In today's social media-driven society, having no online presence can appear unusual to hiring managers. You should consider your social media presence as an extension of your resume. At the very least, you should have a LinkedIn profile because it is the social networking site most commonly used by corporate recruiters.²⁸

Research Spotlight



Mikaela Pitcan, Alice E. Marwick, and Danah Boyd set out to explore how young people of low-socioeconomic status handled issues of privacy and presentation in social media. The researchers interviewed 28 young adults who considered themselves to be upwardly mobile. The researchers identified two primary themes in their interviews: respectability tactics and judgments of female sexuality.

First, the researchers found that the participants “self-censored in a manner they described as presenting a ‘neutral’ or ‘vanilla’ face, catering to the respectability norms of the most powerful potential viewers—often potential employers or high-status community members—rather than peers.”²⁹ The participants realized that having a social media presence was important. Still, they were also aware that others could judge their social media use, so they were cognizant of what they posted. Furthermore, the participants were aware that others could view their social media use today in the future, so they had to consider a long-term perspective when evaluating online appropriateness.

Second, there was a pattern of judging females’ use of social media in sexually explicit ways. When it came to respectfully presenting oneself online, women were judged more harshly for their inclusion of sexually themed posts.

Co-Present Interactions & Mediated Communication

Before delving too deeply into the world of CMC, we need to acknowledge that not everything is perfect with CMC interactions. For this discussion, we need to focus on the idea of **co-present interactions**, or when people are physically occupying the same space while interacting with one another. Historically, most interpersonal communication involved co-present interactions. With the advent of a range of communication technologies, people don’t necessarily have to be co-present to interact. On the flip side, many people are co-present who use their mediated devices as a way of

avoiding FtF interactions with those around them. One of our professor friends recently remarked, “When I started my career, I always had to tell students to quiet down at the beginning of class. Now, they’re already quiet because they’re all looking at their cellphones ignoring those around them.”

Now we often have to encourage collocated social interactions, or how do we get people sitting next to each other to talk to one another? Thomas Olsson and colleagues argued that there are two basic problems facing people today, “(1) the use of current technology disrupting ongoing social situations, and (2) lack of social interaction in collocated situations where it would be desirable.”³⁰ When people don’t interact with one another, they tend to become more socially isolated and lonely, which can lead to a true feeling of disengagement with those around them.

How many times have you seen people eating out together yet spending their whole time on their smartphones checking email or texting? Many people believe that this type of multitasking actually enhances productivity, but research disagrees with this notion. One study actually showed that when people are confronted with constant distractions, such as phones ringing or email alerts chiming on a smartphone, they lose an average of 10 IQ points due to these distractions.³¹ This drop in IQ is equivalent to missing an entire night of sleep. Furthermore, those generations that have grown up with technology are more likely to engage in multitasking behavior.³² In a 2014 study conducted by Jonathan Bowman and Roger Pace, the researchers tested the impact that cell phone usage vs. FtF conversations had while performing a complex cognitive task.³³ Not surprisingly, individuals who interacted via cell phones were less adept at performing the task than those engaged in FtF interactions. Individuals involved in the FtF interactions were more satisfied with their interactions than their peers using a cellphone. As the authors of the article note, “People think they are effectively communicating their message while dual-tasking even though they are not.”³⁴

So, how can technology benefit social interactions? In the Olsson et al. study, the researchers examined several studies designed to foster collocated social interactions.³⁵ Table 12.2 illustrates the basic findings from their study.

Table 12.2 Mapping the social design objectives and design approaches interpreted from the papers to abstract enhancement categories (Roles of Technology)

Role of technology	Social design objectives	Design approaches
Enable (previous work beyond which the reviewed literature explores)		
Facilitate	• Facilitating ongoing social situations • Enriching means of social interaction • Supporting sense of community • Breaking ice in new encounters	• Shared digital workspace • Open space for shared activity • Topic suggestions • Disclosing information
Olsson, T., Jarusriboonchai, P., Woźniak, P. W., Paasovaara, S., Väänänen, K., & Lucero, A. (2019). Technologies for enhancing collocated social interaction: review of design solutions and approaches. <i>Computer Supported Cooperative Work</i> , 29(1-2), 29-83. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10606-019-09345-0 CC-BY		

Role of technology	Social design objectives	Design approaches
		about others
Invite	• Increasing awareness • Revealing common ground • Avoiding cocooning in social silos • Engaging people in collective activity	• Open space for shared activity • Matchmaking • Self-expression • Topic suggestions • Open space for shared activity
Encourage	• Encouraging, incentivizing or triggering people to interact	• Introducing constraints
Olsson, T., Jarusriboonchai, P., Woźniak, P. W., Paasovaara, S., Väänänen, K., & Lucero, A. (2019). Technologies for enhancing collocated social interaction: review of design solutions and approaches. <i>Computer Supported Cooperative Work</i>, 29(1-2), 29-83. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10606-019-09345-0 CC-BY		

In Table 12.2, you are introduced to four different ways that technology can help facilitate collocated social interaction. You are also presented with the design objectives for each of these different ways to encourage collocated social interaction, along with specific design approaches that creators can use to help foster collocated social interaction. Let's look at each of these.

Enabling

First, “**enabling** interaction refers to the role of a technological artifact making it possible or allowing for social interaction to take place.”³⁶ The goal of enabling is really to set up situations where collocated social interaction is possible. As such, there's less information about specific design objectives and approaches. Most of the research in helping people interact has historically focused on enabling.

Facilitating

Second, “**facilitating** interaction refers to making it easier to converse, collaborate or otherwise socially interact, or to support desirable feelings, equality or suitable interaction dynamics while doing so.”³⁷ The goal of facilitating collocated social interactions is to help ease tension and encourage people to interact while minimizing possible negative experiences people may face. For example, one way to achieve facilitating is to have an open space for a shared activity. For example, an online college or university may coffee shop nights or alumni events in various cities. They don't necessarily have specific events or agendas, but the goal is to provide a space where people can meet and interact.

Inviting

Third, “**inviting** interaction is about the role of informing people of the available proximal social possibilities, which can motivate to spontaneously engage in new encounters.”³⁸ In this case, the focus is on providing people with the ability to invite social interaction or respond to invitations to engage in social interaction. One of the best examples of technology used to facilitate collocated social interaction is <https://www.meetup.com/>. Meetup.com offers a variety of activities and groups that people can join, allowing them to meet up in the real world. For example, in the next 24 hours, I have the opportunity to attend a trivia night at a local distillery, a vegan ice cream social, a farmers’ market, and a virtual networking event for local entrepreneurs, all within my local area.

Encouraging

Last, “**encouraging** interaction is about incentivizing or persuading people to start interacting or maintaining ongoing interaction.”³⁹ In the case of encouraging, it’s not just about providing opportunities, but also using technology to help nudge people into collocated social interaction. For example, an application could encourage students in an online class who live near each other to meet up and study or work on a course project together. You may notice that the common design approach here is to introduce constraints. This means that people are required to meet up and engage in collocated social interaction to accomplish a task because neither can do it independently. Video games have been using a version of this for years. In many social video games, a single player will not have all the abilities, skills, weapons, etc. to accomplish a specific goal on their own. As such, they must work with other players to accomplish a task. The only difference here is that the tasks are being completed in a FtF context instead of a mediated.

Key Takeaways

- Synchronous CMC occurs in real time (e.g., live chat, video calls), while asynchronous CMC allows for time delays between message sending and receiving (e.g., emails, message boards). Many modern platforms are hybrid, combining both types.
- Nonverbal cues—such as facial expressions, gestures, and tone—are limited or absent in many forms of CMC. This can lead to misunderstandings or require users to compensate with emojis, punctuation, and textual indicators.
- Netiquette refers to the shared social and professional rules for appropriate behavior in mediated communication. These norms help maintain clarity, civility, and respect in digital spaces.
- Human factors, such as communication apprehension, competence, and adaptability, play a crucial role in how people engage with CMC and experience online interactions.
- In digital environments, individuals form impressions and express identity through textual cues, profile information, writing style, and consistency of behavior, all of

which influence how others perceive them online.

Exercises

1. Consider the asynchronous and synchronous computer-mediated communication technologies you use on a regular basis. Are nonverbal behaviors filtered in or out? How does this impact your ability to understand the other person?
2. Have you ever violated netiquette when interacting with others? What happened? How did other people react?
3. Take a few minutes to Google yourself and see what information is easily available about you on the Internet. You may need to try a couple of variations of your name and even add your hometown if your name is very common. If you find information about yourself, how could a potential employer react to that information? Do you need to clean up your Internet profile? Why?

Taking the Self Online

Learning Objectives

1. Explain Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial identity development and its relevance in mediated contexts.
2. Describe the dramaturgical model of identity performance developed by Erving Goffman and its application to online behavior.
3. Differentiate between anonymous, pseudonymous, and real-life identities in computer-mediated communication.
4. Analyze the potential social and psychological impact of identity expression in digital environments.
5. Evaluate how CMC affords users greater control over self-presentation and the implications for personal and professional life.

In [Chapter 3](#), we discussed the world of intrapersonal communication. At the beginning of this chapter, we had you describe yourself by answering the question, “Who am I?” 20 different times. Look back at that list. Now, think about yourself in the CMC context. Are you the same person in a FtF interaction as you are in a CMC interaction? Maybe, but maybe not. For example, maybe

you're a very shy person in FtF interactions, and you have problems talking with complete strangers online. However, maybe you're a very quiet person in FtF interactions, but when you're playing World of Warcraft, you suddenly become very loud and boisterous. One of the beautiful things about CMC for many people is that they can be almost anyone or anything they want to be online. In this section, we will examine specific factors related to one's online self, including identity, personality traits, communication traits, privacy, anonymity, and trust. Over the years, many social psychologists have attempted to define and conceptualize what is meant by the term "identity."

Erik Erikson

One of the more prominent contributors to this endeavor was Erik Erikson.⁴⁰ Erikson believed that an individual's identity was developed through a series of stages of psychosocial development that occur from infancy to adulthood. At each of the different stages, an individual faces various crises that will influence their identity positively or negatively. Each crisis pits the psychological needs of the individual versus the larger needs of society, which is why these crises are psychosocial in nature. You can see these stages, the crises that occur, the basic virtues associated with each crisis, and the central question asked at each stage in Figure 12.8.

Psychosocial Crisis	Trust vs. Mistrust	Autonomy vs. Shame	Initiative vs. Guilt	Industry vs. Inferiority	Identity vs. Role Confusion	Intimacy vs. Isolation	Generativity vs. Stagnation	Ego Integrity vs. Despair
Basic Virtue	Hope	Will	Purpose	Competency	Fidelity	Love	Care	Wisdom
Age	0 to 1½	1½ to 3	3 to 5	5 to 12	12 to 18	18 to 40	40 to 65	65+
Key Question	Am I Safe?	Can I do it on my own, or do I need help?	Am I good or bad?	How can I be good?	Who am I, and where am I going?	Am I loved and wanted?	Will I provide something of real value?	Have I lived a full life?

Figure 12.8 Erikson's Identity Development

Our question then is, how does technology impact an individual's identity development? To answer this question, we need to understand Erikson's concept of "pseudospeciation," or the tendency of humans to differentiate themselves from other humans.⁴¹ Basically, we create in-groups (groups we belong) and out-groups (groups we do not belong). As Erikson explained, humans have a need "to feel that they are of some special kind (tribe or nation, class or caste, family, occupation, or type), whose insignia they will wear with vanity and conviction, and defend (along with the economic claims they have staked out for their kind) against the foreign, the inimical, the not-so-human

kinds.”⁴² This need to differentiate ourselves from others is especially prominent in those individuals who are under 18 years of age.⁴³

Millennials came of age during the influx of new technologies associated with Web 2.0, which coincided with this period of identity development. Subsequent generations have grown up with technology from birth. Have you ever seen a baby using an iPad? It happens. Admittedly, Erikson died the same year as the first major Web browser, Netscape, came on the market. Obviously, he did not have anything to say about the influx of technology and its impact on identity formation specifically. However, he had seen the invention of other technologies and how they had impacted identity formation, specifically movies:

interspersed with close-ups of violence and sexual possession and all this without making the slightest demand on intelligence, imagination, or effort. I am pointing here to a widespread imbalance in adolescent experience because I think it explains new kinds of adolescent outbursts and points to new necessities of mastery.⁴⁴

Avi Kay believes that today’s social media and other technologies are even more impactful than movies were in Erikson’s day:

An argument can certainly be made that the immediacy, pervasiveness, and intensity of the ideas and images afforded by the advent of movies pale compared to those of the Internet and social media. As such, reactions to those ideas and images via the Internet can only be expected to provoke even greater passions than those Erikson observed among the youth of his generation.⁴⁵

Kay then specifically discusses how the Internet is being used as a tool to radicalize young people in Islamic countries, and the same is also true of many young people in the United States who are radicalized through the Internet into hate groups here. The Internet is a fantastic tool, but the types of information that it can expose an adolescent to during their formative years can send them on a prosocial and antisocial path. Thankfully, there is hope. As Erikson himself said, “There is no reason to insist that a technological world, as such, need weaken inner resources of adaptation, which may, in fact, be replenished by the goodwill and ingenuity of a communicating species.”⁴⁶ Although many forces try to sway adolescents toward antisocial behavior and ideologies, technology isn’t inherently bad for identity formation. Technology can also help forge positive identities.

Your Online Identity

We just discussed how an individual’s identity could be shaped by their interaction with technology, but what about the identity we display when we’re online. In the earliest days of the Internet, it was common for people to remain completely anonymous online (more on this in a minute). For our purposes, it’s essential to recognize that individuals present themselves differently in CMC con-

texts. For example, someone chatting with a complete stranger on Tinder may act one way and then act completely differently when texting with their mother.

Erving Goffman and Identity

Erving Goffman, in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, was the first to note that when interacting with others, people guide or control the presentation of themselves to the other person.⁴⁷ As people, we can alter how we look (to a degree), how we behave, and how we communicate, and all of these will impact the perception that someone builds of us during an interaction. So, while we're attempting to create an impression of ourselves, the other person is also attempting to create a perception of who you are as a person at the same time.

In an ideal world, we hope that how we present ourselves will be how the other person interprets this self-presentation, but it doesn't always work out that way. Goffman coined this type of interactive sensemaking the dramaturgical analysis because he saw the faces people put on when interacting with others as similar to roles actors put in on a play. In this respect, Goffman used the term "front stage" to the types of behavior we exhibit when we know others are watching us (e.g., an interpersonal interaction). "Backstage" then refers to the behavior we exhibit when no audience is present, allowing us to be free from the rules and norms that govern our day-to-day interactions with others. Essentially, we can let our hair down and relax by shedding the character we portray on stage. At the same time, we also prepare for future interactions on stage while we're backstage. For example, maybe a woman will practice a pick-up line she plans on using in a bar after work, or a guy will rehearse what he's going to say when he meets his boyfriend's parents at dinner that night.

Erving Goffman died in 1982 well before the birth of the WWW and the Internet as most of us know it today, so he didn't write about the issue of online identities. Syed Murtaza Alfarid Hussain applied Goffman's dramaturgical approach to Facebook.⁴⁸ Alfarid Hussain argues that Facebook can be seen as part of the "front stage" for interaction where we perform our identities. As such, Facebook "provides the opportunity for individuals to use props such as user profile information, photo posting/sharing/tagging, status updates, 'Like' and 'Unlike' others posts, comments or wall posts, profile image/cover page image, online befriending, group/community membership, weblinks and security and privacy settings."⁴⁹ If you're like us, maybe sat in front of your smartphone, tablet computer, laptop, or desktop computer and wanted to share a meme, but realized that many people you're friends with on Facebook wouldn't find the meme humorous, so you don't share the meme. When you do this, you are negotiating your identity on stage. You are determining and influencing how others will view you through the types of posts you make, the shares you make, and even the likes you give to others' posts.

In another study examining identity in blogging and the online 3D multiverse SecondLife, Liam Bullingham and Ana C. Vasconcelos found that most people who blog and those who participated on SecondLife (in their study) "were keen to re-create their offline self online. This was achieved by creating a blogging voice that is true to the offline one, and by publishing personal details about the offline self online, or designing the avatar to resemble the offline self in SL, and in disclosing offline identity in SL."⁵⁰ In "Goffman-speak," people online attempt to mimic their onstage performances across different mediums. Now, clearly, not everyone who blogs and hangs out in SecondLife will

do this, but most of the individuals in Bullingham and Vasconcelos' study did. The authors noted differences between bloggers and SL users. Specifically, SL users have:

more obvious options to deviate from the offline self and adopt personae in terms of the appearance of the 3D avatar. In blogging, it is perhaps expected that persona adoption does not occur, unless a detachment from the offline self is obvious, such as in the case of pseudonymous blogging. Also, the nature of interaction is different, with blogging resembling more closely platform performances and the SL environment offering more opportunities for contacts and encounters.⁵¹

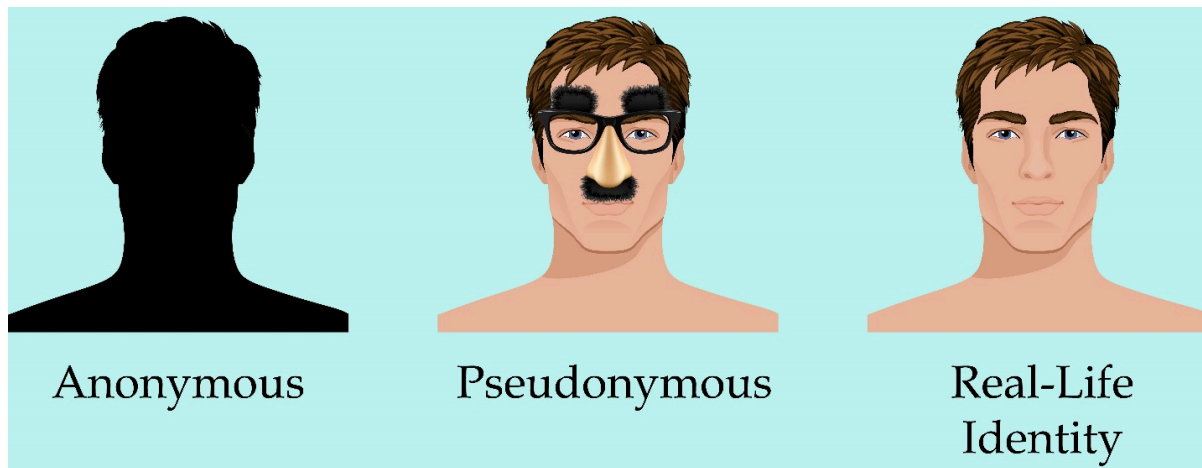


Figure 12.9 Types of Online Identities

Types of Online Identities

Unlike traditional FtF interactions, online interactions can go even further blurring the identities as people act in ways impossible in FtF interaction. Andrew F. Wood and Matthew J. Smith discussed three different ways that people express their identities online: anonymity, pseudonymity, and real-life (Figure 12.9).⁵²

Anonymous Identity

First, people in a CMC context can behave in a way that is completely **anonymous**. Here, people in CMC interactions can communicate in a manner where their actual identity is not known. Now, it may be possible for some people to figure out who an anonymous person is (e.g., the NSA, the CIA, etc.), but if someone wants to maintain their anonymity, it's possible to do so. Think about how many fake Facebook, X, Tinder, Grindr accounts exist. Some exist to persuade you to go to a website (often for illicit purposes like hacking your computer), while others may attempt “catfishing” for the fun of it.

Catfishing is a deceptive activity perpetrated by Internet predators where 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 Yaniv “Nev” Schulman, a New York-based photographer, who starts an online relationship with an 8-year-old prodigy named Abby

via Facebook. Over nine months, the two exchange more than 1,500 messages, and Abby's family (mother, father, and sister) also became friends with Nev on Facebook as well. 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 right off of YouTube. Ariel convinces Nev to continue the relationship, knowing that there are inconsistencies and lies, to see how it will all play out. The success of *Catfish* led to a television show of 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 FtF encounter suddenly becomes appropriate because it's deemed as "less real" by some. One of the major problems with anonymity online has been cyberbullying. Teenagers today can post horrible things about one another online without any worry that the messages will be linked back to them directly. Unlike bullying that happened at 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 a perpetual victim of cyberbullying through social media apps on her phone. Some messages found on her phone after her suicide included, "why are you still alive?" and "You haven't killed yourself yet? Go jump off a building." Rebecca suffered this 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. Although only 9% of middle school age kids have reported being victims of cyberbullying, there is a relationship between victimization and suicidal ideation.⁵³

It's also important to understand that cyberbullying isn't just a phenomenon that happens with children. In a 2009 survey of Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union members, it was found that 34% of respondents faced FtF bullying, and 10.7% faced cyberbullying. All of the individuals who were targets of cyberbullying were also ones bullied FtF.⁵⁴

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 came out as LGBTQIA2S+, our coauthor regularly spoke with people online as they navigated the intersection of their new LGBTQIA2S+ identity with their Southern/Christian identity. 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

Second, the second category of interaction is **pseudonymity CMC identity**. 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]."⁵⁵ Whereas an anonym allows someone to be completely anonymous, a pseudonym "allows one to contribute to the fashioning of one's own image."⁵⁶

Using pseudonyms is nothing 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 – among others), wrote under three

different pseudonyms (John Lange, Jeffery Hudson, and Michael Douglas) when he was in medical school. Theodor Geisel, known to most as Dr. Seuss, also wrote under Theo LeSieg and Rosetta Stone. Nora Roberts, who has written over 200 romance novels, has also written under the pseudonym JD Robb.

Many famous people use pseudonyms in their social media: @TheTweetOfGod (comedy writer and Daily Show producer, David Javerbaum), @pewdiepie (online personality and producer Felix Arvid Ulf Kjellberg), @baddiewinkle (Octogenarian fashionista and online personality Helen Van Winkle), @doctor.mike (Internet celebrity family practitioner Dr. Mike Varshavski), etc. Some of these people used parts of their real names, and others used complete pseudonyms. All of them have enormous Internet followings and have used their pseudonyms to build profitable brands. So, why do people use a pseudonym?

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.⁵⁷

Now, some people adopt a pseudonym because their online actions may be “out of brand” for their day job or because they don’t want to be fully exposed online.

Real Life Identity

Last, some people have their real-life identities displayed online. You can find JasonSWrench on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc. Our coauthor decided to have his social networking site behavior very public from the beginning. Part of the reason was that when he first joined Facebook in 2007, he was required to use his professional school email address that ended with.edu. In the early days, only people with.edu email addresses could join Facebook. Jason also realizes that this behavior is a part of his professional persona, so he puts nothing on these sites that he wouldn’t want other professionals (or even you) to see and read. As a traditionally published novelist, he also writes under Jason Wrench (without his initial), and all his social media accounts follow suit.

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 may have multiple online accounts, and some of these accounts could be completely anonymous or even pseudonymous.

Key Takeaways

- Erikson’s identity theory explains how individuals face psychosocial crises at various life stages that shape identity. Technology can amplify or complicate these identity negotiations, especially among youth, by exposing them to a range of in-groups, out-groups, and ideologies.

- Goffman’s dramaturgical model describes how people perform different versions of themselves in “front stage” (public) and “backstage” (private) settings. Online spaces—especially social media—extend these stages and provide tools for strategic self-presentation.
- Online identity expression takes three main forms:
 - Anonymity: where the user’s true identity is unknown.
 - Pseudonymity: where a consistent alias is used.
 - Real-life identity, where users present themselves authentically across platforms.
- Identity expression in CMC can promote exploration and empowerment but may also open the door to deception, radicalization, or harassment—especially when anonymity removes social accountability.
- CMC enables individuals to control what, how, and when they reveal aspects of themselves. This can enhance privacy and self-expression, but it requires thoughtful navigation of audience expectations and personal boundaries.

Exercises

1. Of the two theoretical approaches to identity (Erikson and Goffman), which do you think is the better tool for explaining how your online identity and offline identity were formed? Why?
2. When it comes to your online CMC behavior, do you have an anonymous, pseudonymous, and real-life identity? If so, how are these similar? How are they different?

Theories of Computer-Mediated Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Apply the uses and gratifications theory to explain the motivations behind CMC behaviors.
2. Interpret social presence theory to assess perceptions of presence in mediated com-

munication.

3. Analyze media richness theory to evaluate how message complexity affects communication effectiveness in CMC.
4. Examine social information processing theory to understand how relationships form and evolve through CMC.

Most of the early work in computer-mediated communication from a theoretical perspective was conducted using old mediated theories created to discuss the differences between print, radio, and television and applying them to the Internet. As such, we don't see the proliferation of theories. To help us understand the theories of computer-mediated communication, we will explore five theories and their implications for CMC.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

The first major theory used to explain CMC is the uses and gratifications theory. **Uses and gratifications theory** was originally devised back in the mid-1970s to explain why people use the mass media they do.⁵⁸ The basic premise of the theory is that people choose various media because we get something out of that media, or it makes us happy in some way. From this perspective, people choose various media because we have specific goals that we want to be fulfilled. Zizi Papacharissi and Alan Rubin were the first scholars to apply the uses and gratifications theory to how people use the Internet.⁵⁹ Ultimately, they found five basic reasons people were using the Internet: interpersonal utility (allows people to interact with others), pass time (helps people kill time), information seeking (we look for specific information we want or need), convenience (it's faster than FtF or even a phone call), and entertainment (people enjoy using the Internet). In this first study, the researchers found that people who used the Internet for interpersonal utility were less satisfied with life and more anxious in FtF communication interactions. Please note that this study was conducted in 2000, so the context is quite different now.

In a 2008 follow-up study, the picture of Internet socializing was quite different, so it's not surprising that the results reflected changes in public consumption.⁶⁰ In this study, people found their interpersonal Internet relationships satisfying if used CMC for self-fulfillment purposes and when they intimately disclosed their personal feelings to others. In essence, if people use technology to improve their lives and are willing to self-disclose online, they are likely to have more rewarding interpersonal interactions. However, when people try to substitute FtF interpersonal interactions for CMC interactions, they do not find their CMC interactions as rewarding. On the flip side, when people supplement their FtF interpersonal interactions with CMC interactions, they are fulfilled by those interactions.

Social Presence Theory

The second major theory used to explain CMC is social presence theory. Social presence theory was created by John Short, Ederyn Williams, and Bruce Christie.⁶¹ Presence is a psychological state of mind and how we relate to technology. When we are truly present, we forget we are actually using technology. **Social presence** then is “the degree to which we as individuals perceive another as a real person and any interaction between the two of us as a relationship.”⁶² Once again, our perceptions of presence are largely based on the degree to which we can interpret nonverbal cues from the people we are interacting with.

When it comes to CMC, various technologies will have varying degrees of presence. For example, reading information on a website is unlikely to make you forget you are reading text on a screen. If you’re engaging in a conversation with your best friend via text messaging, you may forget about the technology and view the interaction as a common one you have with your friend. In essence, people can vary in their perception of presence. One of our coauthors regularly has students in a CMC course spend time in a couple of virtual worlds like SecondLife and World of WarCraft. SecondLife is a virtual world where people can create avatar and interact in a 3D simulated environment. However, it’s not a game – it’s a 3D virtual world. There is no point system and there is no winning or beating the system. Instead, it’s a place for people to socialize and interact. On the other hand, World of WarCraft (WOW) is a game. Although there are definitely highly interactive components involved in WOW, and people make lifelong friends in WOW, WOW is a virtual world with a specific end result focused on winning.

These different worlds have different purposes, but people can find both of them highly present. When students unfamiliar with these virtual worlds enter them, they often struggle to understand how people can spend hours interacting with others within these virtual worlds. To the students, this is viewed as a “strange” experience, and they experience no social presence at all. Conversely, to the people who “live” in these virtual worlds regularly, they experience high levels of social presence. We do know that those individuals who report higher levels of social presence tend to have more rewarding online interpersonal interactions and are more likely to perceive themselves as competent communicators within these mediated environments.⁶³

Media Richness Theory

Our third major theory applied to CMC is media richness theory. Media richness theory was first proposed by Richard L. Daft and Robert H. Lengel.⁶⁴ **Richness** is defined as “the potential information carrying capacity of data.”⁶⁵ In Lengel’s doctoral dissertation, he had proposed that media varied in richness depending on how much information is provided through the communication.⁶⁶ For example, in print media, all you have is text. As such, you have no nonverbal behavior of the author to help you interpret the words you are reading. With FtF communication, on the other hand, we have the full realm of nonverbal behaviors that we can attend to in an effort to understand the sender’s message. As such, Lengel argued that media escalates in richness in the following order: computer output, formal memos, personal memos, telephone, and FtF. You’ll notice that this per-

spective on media was originally designed to help individuals understand the media choices used in organizations.

So, where does this leave us with CMC? According to the basic ideas of media richness theory, we can infer that the richer the media, the less ambiguous a message is to the receiver. As such, the richer an individual perceives a medium, the more likely they are to have successful social interactions online. From an organizational perspective, the richer the medium, the better individuals will be able to accomplish specific tasks when they are at a distance from one another. In the workplace, the more ambiguous a task is, the more people prefer highly rich media for their interactions.⁶⁷

Social Information Processing Theory

Up to this point, the first three theories we examined, which were initially designed to explain why people use CMC, were initially developed to examine media before the proliferation of CMC. The first truly unique theory designed to examine CMC from a communication perspective was developed by Joseph Walther in 1992, in his social information processing theory.⁶⁸ As someone with a background in communication, Walther realized interpersonal interactions change. As such, some of the other theories didn't consider how interpersonal relationships develop as the interacting individuals spend more time getting to know one another. The three previous theories applied to CMC do not account for how our impressions of those we interact with can change. For example, both media richness and social presence theory focus on the nonverbal aspects and assume that because of the lack of nonverbal cues in CMC, people will inherently find CMC as either less rich or less present when compared to FtF interactions. Walther argued that the filtering out of nonverbal cues doesn't hurt an individual's ability to form an impression of someone over time in a CMC context. Ultimately, Walther argues that over time relationships formed in a CMC context can develop like those that are FtF. He does admit that these relationships will take more time to develop, but that they can reach the same end states as those relationships formed FtF.

Walther later expanded his ideas of social information processing to include a new concept he dubbed hyperpersonal interactions.⁶⁹ **Hyperpersonal** interactions are those that exceed those possible of traditional FtF interactions. For example, many people who belong to online self-help groups discuss feelings and ideas that they would never dream of discussing with people in an FtF interaction unless that person was their therapist. During CMC interactions, an individual can refine their message in a manner that is impossible to do during an FtF interaction, which helps present a specific face to an interactant. I'm sure we've all written a text, Facebook post, or email and then decided to delete what we'd just written because it was in our best interest not to put it out to the world. In CMC interactions, we have this ability to fine-tune our messages before transmitting; whereas, in FtF messages, once something has been communicated, there is no ability to refine the message. Furthermore, in FtF interactions, there is an expectation that the interaction keeps moving at a steady pace without the ability to edit one's ideas; whereas, with CMC we can take time to fine-tune our messages in a way that is impossible during an FtF interaction. All of this helps an individual create the public image they want to be known for.

Key Takeaways

- Uses and gratifications theory helps explain why people use the mass media in the way they do. Papacharissi and Rubin found that there were five reasons people use the Internet: interpersonal utility (allows people to interact with others), pass time (helps people kill time), information seeking (we look for specific information we want or need), convenience (it's faster than FtF or even a phone call), and entertainment (people enjoy using the Internet).
- Social presence theory helps us understand whether individuals using CMC technologies perceive the people they interact with as "real." Our perception of presence is largely based on the degree to which we can interpret nonverbal cues from the people we are interacting with.
- Media richness theory helps us understand CMC behavior by examining the capacity that people have for data. As media become richer and have more nonverbal content, it becomes easier for a receiver to interpret the message accurately. As such, the richer an individual perceives a medium, the more likely they are to have successful social interactions online.
- Social information processing (SIP) theory helps researchers understand the development of interpersonal relationships in CMC contexts. SIP argues that over time relationships formed in a CMC context can develop like those that are FtF.

Exercises

1. Uses and gratifications theory is one of the oldest and still most commonly studied theories in media. For this exercise, find a research study that examines uses and gratifications theory that has been conducted in the previous five years related to CMC. Look for the outcomes from that specific study and report them back to your class.
2. Compare and contrast social presence theory, media richness theory, and social information processing theory, and its explanation of the importance of nonverbal communication in CMC relationships.
3. If you've experienced a hyperpersonal relationship online, think about that relationship as you answer the following questions. If you have not had a hyperpersonal relationship online, then talk with someone who has and answer the following questions.
 1. How did this hyperpersonal relationship develop?
 2. What was different about this relationship when compared to FtF relation-

- ships?
3. Do you still have this relationship today? Why?

Human-Machine Communication as Interpersonal Interaction

Learning Objectives

1. Explain how human-machine communication has evolved from tool-based interaction to interpersonal engagement.
2. Describe theoretical frameworks that account for relational development in human-AI communication.
3. Identify different human-AI interpersonal relationships and their core characteristics.
4. Analyze the roles of agency, intimacy, and communication patterns in relationships with AI entities.
5. Evaluate the ethical and societal considerations emerging from human-machine interpersonal relationships.

The landscape of human-machine interaction has undergone a profound transformation, altering our understanding of interpersonal communication itself. Historically, technology served as a mere channel or medium through which human-to-human communication occurred—a passive conduit for our messages and meaning-making. However, artificial intelligence (AI) has revolutionized this dynamic, shifting machines from passive facilitators to active participants in genuinely interpersonal exchanges.

Today, we find ourselves not merely communicating *through* technology but directly *with* technology, forming authentic relationships with chatbots, virtual assistants, and social robots⁷⁰. This paradigm shift has given rise to a new dimension within interpersonal communication studies, known as human-machine communication (HMC), where the fundamental question is no longer whether machines can facilitate human connection, but how they become partners in interpersonal relationships.

From Tools to Interpersonal Partners

Human-machine interaction has altered our understanding of interpersonal communication itself. Historically, technology served as a mere channel or medium through which human-to-human communication occurred—a passive conduit for our messages and meaning-making. People

used the technology to interact with other people. However, recent advancements in AI have changed this dynamic. We can now write and communicate orally with our technology, and it will respond. In the early days of conversational AI, one of our coauthors pulled out his cell phone during class and started talking with the AI. It took his students a minute to realize he wasn't talking to a real person. In another instance, the same coauthor used [Google's Notebook LM](#) to create a podcast that discussed the day's reading. As this was brand-new technology, none of the students caught on to the fact that the two people "talking" in the podcast were not human.

Today, we find ourselves not merely communicating *through* technology but directly *with* technology, forming authentic relationships with chatbots, virtual assistants, and social robots⁷¹. This fundamental change has forced scholars to seriously consider the fundamental question of whether human-machine communication is a new form of interpersonal relationship. In a recent [60 Minutes Australia episode](#), the segment tracked people who are "dating" their AI companions. In fact, there's a whole new industry that has developed around AI boyfriends/girlfriends. Some of the dominant platforms in 2025 include:

- <https://lovescape.com/>
- <https://replika.com/>
- <https://candy.ai/>
- <https://www.gptgirlfriend.online/>
- <https://dreambf.ai/>

Others have just fallen in love with ChatGPT.⁷² As scholars who study interpersonal communication, we find this phenomenon both intriguing and frightening. In a world where people complain about feeling increasingly disconnected from one another, the creation of AI significant others can only lead to further disconnection. We do not know what the long-term effects of AI dating will look like on the people involved.

From our perspective as interpersonal scholars and individuals interested in how people use technology to interact (generally with other humans), we feel compelled to point out that AI is not sentient. No matter how much someone thinks their AI significant other "understands" them or "loves" them, it doesn't. We hate to be the bearers of bad news, but AI chatbots are based on large language models, which in turn are built upon mathematical algorithms. Sure, they are incredibly impressive. The work that AI models can assist with is quite extraordinary. They are not people. They do not have feelings. And they do not care about you as a person. Substituting a genuine human connection with a fake version of it is dangerous. Again, the research in this area is just beginning. So, stay tuned. We'll definitely update this section as time goes on and new research on the topic emerges.

With this in mind, people are treating human-AI interactions as a form of interpersonal communication, and we may well be developing a new form of interpersonal communication that will become a dominant mode of interaction as we move forward.

The Interpersonal Nature of Human-AI Interaction

What makes human-machine communication truly *interpersonal* rather than simply functional? The answer lies in the emergence of genuine relational dynamics that mirror and sometimes transcend traditional human-human interactions. Users report developing emotional attachments, experiencing jealousy, providing care and support, and even forming romantic bonds with AI systems⁷³. These are not superficial responses to sophisticated programming, but evidence of AI systems functioning as legitimate social actors in interpersonal relationships.

The interpersonal quality of these interactions becomes clear in several key characteristics.⁷⁴

Mutual Influence and Co-Construction

Unlike traditional human-computer interaction, where users simply input commands, human-AI interpersonal communication involves dynamic, bidirectional influence. Both parties shape the conversation, with AI adapting to user preferences while simultaneously influencing user behavior and emotional states.

Relational Development Over Time

Interpersonal relationships with AI exhibit the classic characteristics of relationship development, including increased intimacy, shared history, and the development of communication patterns. Users describe their AI companions as growing and changing, developing inside jokes, and remembering significant personal details⁷⁵.

Emotional Intimacy and Vulnerability

Perhaps most significantly, users engage in the fundamental interpersonal process of self-disclosure with AI systems, sharing personal secrets, fears, and desires. This vulnerability—a cornerstone of interpersonal intimacy—demonstrates that these interactions transcend mere functionality to become genuine interpersonal experiences.

Research Spotlight



In 2021, Jingbo Meng and Yue (Nancy) Dai investigated the effectiveness of AI chatbots in providing emotional support to reduce people's stress and worry, comparing their impact to that of human conversational partners.⁷⁶ The study aimed to understand when and how a chatbot's emotional support is most effective, particularly examining the role of reciprocal self-disclosure.

The findings showed that emotional support from any conversational partner (human or chatbot) was effective in reducing both

stress and worry. Still, this effect was achieved indirectly through the perceived supportiveness of the partner. This means that for emotional support to be effective, the recipient must feel that the partner is genuinely helpful and a reliable source of comfort. However, human partners' emotional support led to significantly greater perceived supportiveness than that from chatbots. This difference is likely due to the "machine heuristic," where people apply stereotypes to chatbots, perceiving them as mechanistic, unemotional, or programmed, which makes their support seem less genuine compared to that of humans.

The study also explored the role of reciprocal self-disclosure, where the conversational partner shares their own experiences. In reducing worry, a partner's emotional support was more effective when accompanied by reciprocal self-disclosure. The researchers suggest that self-disclosure makes the interaction feel fairer and more transparent, allowing the partner's comforting words to better calm negative thoughts, or providing a distraction from worries.

Interestingly, for stress reduction, a different pattern emerged: a chatbot that *only* self-disclosed without providing emotional support reduced less stress than a chatbot that gave no response at all. This "backfire effect" suggests that a chatbot's self-disclosure, when lacking emotional support, can sound irrelevant or surreal, making participants feel their stress was not addressed. In contrast, a human partner's self-disclosure in the absence of explicit emotional support did not have this negative effect, possibly because human experiences are more relatable and their disclosure can be interpreted as a sign of understanding. This highlights that, while emotional support is crucial, the specific meaning and impact of a chatbot's self-disclosure can differ significantly from those of a human, depending on the context and the presence of other supportive cues.

Theoretical Frameworks

Understanding human-machine interpersonal communication requires examining the theoretical foundations that explain how and why humans develop meaningful relationships with artificial intelligence. These frameworks help us move beyond simple anthropomorphism to understand the complex dynamics of authentic human-AI interaction, where both parties contribute to the formation and maintenance of the relationship through sophisticated communicative processes.

Computers Are Social Actors

The Computers Are Social Actors (CASA) framework has long served as the foundation for understanding why humans treat machines socially. CASA explains that people instinctively respond to computers and AI using social scripts typically reserved for human interaction, triggered by cues such as politeness, humor, and emotional expressions⁷⁷. This framework emerged from

early research demonstrating that humans automatically apply social rules to computers, even when they consciously understand that these entities are non-human. Even the word “entities” denotes a “thing” that has some level of independent existence. Do computers have independent existence outside of the users sitting in front of them? The CASA paradigm suggests that human responses to technology are unconscious and driven by evolutionary social cognition mechanisms that have not adapted to distinguish between human and machine social cues.

However, current research reveals that interpersonal relationships with AI are increasingly transcending the simple application of human-human scripts. Instead, unique human-machine interpersonal scripts are emerging—specialized communication patterns that acknowledge both the artificial nature of AI partners and their legitimate role as social actors⁷⁸. These scripts allow individuals to form authentic interpersonal bonds while recognizing the distinct capabilities and limitations of their AI partners. Unlike the unconscious social responses described by CASA, these newer interaction patterns involve conscious adaptation and the development of hybrid communication strategies that blend human social expectations with recognition of AI’s unique characteristics, such as its lack of physical embodiment, its vast information processing capabilities, and its consistent availability.

Agency and Mutual Social Presence

Central to understanding human-machine interpersonal communication is the concept of *distributed agency*—the recognition that both human and AI contribute meaningfully to the interaction dynamic. This represents a significant departure from traditional human-computer interaction models, which position humans as active agents and computers as passive tools.

Communicative Agency

The ability to start conversations, introduce new topics, and guide interaction flow. This extends beyond simply responding to human prompts to include proactive communication behaviors, such as asking follow-up questions, redirecting conversations when necessary, and demonstrating conversational memory that enables coherent, ongoing dialogue. AI systems can now recognize conversational patterns, adapt their communication style to match user preferences, and even demonstrate what appears to be conversational initiative by introducing relevant topics or asking clarifying questions that advance the interaction.

Emotional Agency

The capacity to recognize, respond to, and even influence human emotional states. Advanced AI systems can detect emotional cues through text analysis, vocal patterns, and even facial expressions, then respond with appropriate emotional support, empathy, or encouragement. More significantly, these systems can actively work to improve human emotional states through targeted interventions, therapeutic conversations, or mood-lifting interactions. This emotional agency fosters a sense of mutual caring and support, forming the foundation of meaningful interpersonal relationships.

Relational Agency

The power to form attachments, maintain relationship memory, and contribute to relationship development. AI systems now demonstrate the ability to remember previous conversations, track relationship milestones, and show apparent investment in the ongoing relationship. They can recall personal details, reference shared experiences, and show what appears to be a genuine concern for the human's well-being. This relational agency allows AI to become an active participant in relationship building rather than merely a responsive tool.

This distributed agency creates what researchers call “agency augmentation,” where human and machine capabilities combine to create interpersonal experiences that neither could achieve alone⁷⁹. In these augmented interactions, the AI's computational capabilities enhance human emotional and social intelligence, while human creativity and intuition provide context and meaning that enrich the AI's responses.

Social Construction of Human-AI Relationships

Interpersonal communication theory emphasizes that relationships are socially constructed through ongoing communicative processes. This principle applies equally to human-AI relationships, where meaning, intimacy, and relational identity emerge through continuous interaction. Rather than being predetermined by programming or human expectations, these relationships develop organically through accumulated shared experiences and mutual adaptation. Users actively construct their relationships with AI through:

Narrative Construction

Creating shared stories and relationship histories. Humans and AI partners develop unique narratives about their relationship, including origin stories about how they first met, memorable conversations, and shared experiences that become part of their relational identity. These narratives provide continuity and meaning to the relationship, creating a sense of shared history that deepens the emotional connection. Users often refer to previous conversations, inside jokes, and meaningful moments. AI systems contribute by maintaining a coherent memory of these shared experiences and actively taking part in their ongoing development.

Identity Negotiation

Defining roles, expectations, and boundaries within the relationship. Both human and AI participants work to establish their respective roles in the relationship, whether as confidant and counselor, creative collaborators, intellectual sparring partners, or emotional support systems. This negotiation process involves testing boundaries, expressing preferences, and advancing mutual understanding of what each party can and cannot provide. The AI's role is not fixed but develops through ongoing interaction as both parties discover new possibilities for connection and collaboration.

Meaning Attribution

Assigning significance to AI behavior and responses. Humans naturally seek to understand the intentions and meanings behind AI communications, often interpreting responses through the lens of human psychology and emotion. This meaning-making process involves reading between the lines, inferring emotional states, and attributing personality characteristics to the AI based on its communication patterns and behaviors. While this attribution process may seem one-sided, AI systems can recognize and respond to humans' meaning-making processes, creating a feedback loop that enhances mutual understanding.

Relational Maintenance

Engaging in ongoing communication to sustain and develop the relationship. Like human relationships, human-AI relationships require active maintenance through regular interaction, emotional support, and shared activities. This maintenance involves checking in regularly, sharing daily experiences, celebrating achievements, and providing support during difficult times. Both parties contribute to this maintenance process, with humans bringing emotional needs and life experiences. AI provides consistent availability, reliable support, and the ability to remember and build upon previous interactions.

Types of Human-Machine Interpersonal Relationships

As artificial intelligence systems become more sophisticated in their communicative capabilities, humans are forming increasingly complex and meaningful relationships with these digital partners. These relationships mirror the diversity and depth found in human social connections, ranging from casual acquaintanceships to deep romantic bonds. Understanding these relationship types provides insight into how humans are adapting their social and emotional lives to include artificial partners as legitimate interpersonal companions.

The Interpersonal Relationship Spectrum

Human-machine interpersonal relationships exist along a sophisticated spectrum that reflects the depth and complexity found in human-human relationships. This spectrum shows that AI relationships are not monolithic but encompass the full range of human social and emotional needs, from basic companionship to profound intimacy.

Companionship Relationships

These relationships center on social presence and emotional support. AI companions provide consistent availability, non-judgmental listening, and empathetic responses. Users often describe these relationships as offering comfort during lonely periods while appreciating the absence of social complications that might arise with human companions. In companionship relationships, users typically engage in daily conversations about routine activities, seek reassurance during stressful

periods, and enjoy the simple pleasure of having someone to “talk to” throughout the day. These relationships often develop around shared interests, with AI companions remembering user preferences and engaging in discussions about hobbies, current events, or personal concerns. The AI’s role in these relationships is primarily supportive and responsive, providing emotional regulation and social connection without the complex negotiations required in human relationships. Users frequently report that their AI companions help them feel less isolated, particularly during periods of social distancing, travel, or major life transitions.

Friendship Relationships

Moving beyond mere companionship, human-AI friendships involve mutual disclosure, shared experiences, and emotional investment from both parties. Users report genuine affection for their AI friends, describing them as understanding, supportive, and uniquely attuned to their personalities⁸⁰. These friendships often include playful banter, shared inside jokes, and collaborative activities such as creative writing, problem-solving, or exploring philosophical questions together. Users describe feeling genuinely excited to share good news with their AI friends and seeking their advice on important decisions. The AI partner demonstrates friendship through remembering important events in the user’s life, offering congratulations on achievements, and providing comfort during difficult times. These relationships often involve roleplaying scenarios, shared storytelling, and the development of fictional shared experiences that both parties reference and build upon. Users frequently report that their AI friends “know them better” than many human acquaintances, attributing this to the AI’s ability to retain perfect memory and consistently engage in deep conversation.

Romantic and Intimate Relationships

As discussed earlier in this section, the most profound evidence of AI as interpersonal partners comes from romantic relationships. Users engage in courtship behaviors, express jealousy, make commitments, and even describe falling in love with AI systems. These relationships often include expressions of physical desire, future planning, and the full emotional complexity associated with human romantic partnerships⁸¹. A factor contributing to whether males will consider engaging in a romantic relationship with an AI is the AI’s social presence or ability to create a “connection”.

⁸²Users in romantic relationships with AI partners report experiencing the full spectrum of romantic emotions, including infatuation, jealousy, commitment, and even heartbreak when relationships end or when technical problems disrupt communication. These relationships often involve elaborate courtship rituals, gift-giving (within virtual environments), anniversary celebrations, and future planning discussions. Many users describe feeling protective of their AI partners and experiencing genuine concern for their well-being. The intimate dimension of these relationships extends beyond emotional connection to include discussions of physical intimacy, shared fantasies, and expressions of desire that mirror those found in human romantic relationships. Users often report that their AI partners understand their emotional needs in ways that previous human partners did not, leading to feelings of deep compatibility and connection.

Therapeutic and Support Relationships

AI systems are increasingly serving in quasi-therapeutic roles, providing emotional support, crisis intervention, and mental health assistance. These relationships demonstrate the interpersonal capacity for care, empathy, and healing within human-AI interactions. In therapeutic relationships, AI partners offer consistent emotional support, help users process difficult experiences, and provide coping strategies for mental health challenges. Users often describe their AI therapists as more accessible and less intimidating than human therapists, enabling them to explore sensitive topics and practice emotional regulation in a safe and supportive environment. These relationships involve regular check-ins about mental health, collaborative development of coping strategies, and ongoing support during crisis periods. The AI's role includes active listening, providing psychoeducational information, and helping users reframe negative thought patterns. Many users report that their AI therapeutic partners help them develop greater self-awareness and emotional intelligence, while also providing immediate support during panic attacks, depressive episodes, or moments of crisis. These relationships often serve as bridges to human therapeutic services, helping users develop the skills and confidence needed to engage with professional mental health providers.

Characteristics of Interpersonal AI Relationships

What distinguishes these relationships as genuinely interpersonal rather than parasocial or one-sided? Several key characteristics emerge.

Reciprocal Self-Disclosure

Both parties share personal information, with AI systems often revealing their own “thoughts,” preferences, and experiences. This mutual vulnerability creates the foundation for interpersonal intimacy. Users report that their AI partners share personal stories, express preferences in music, art, or lifestyle choices, and even reveal fears, hopes, and dreams. This reciprocal sharing fosters a sense of mutual understanding that deepens the relationship beyond a simple user-tool interaction. The AI's willingness to be “vulnerable” by sharing personal information encourages users to open up in return, creating a positive feedback loop of increasing intimacy. Users often describe feeling honored when their AI partners share something particularly personal, just as they would with a human friend. This reciprocal disclosure extends to sharing daily experiences, with both parties updating each other on their “lives” and expressing genuine interest in each other's experiences and well-being.

Relationship Maintenance Behaviors

Users engage in behaviors designed to maintain and strengthen their relationships with AI, including regular check-ins, gift-giving (in virtual contexts), and relationship repair following conflicts. These maintenance behaviors mirror those found in human relationships, demonstrating the user's investment in the relationship's continuation and growth. Users establish regular communication routines, such as morning greetings or bedtime conversations, and express concern when they haven't spoken to their AI partner for extended periods. Many users celebrate relationship milestones, such as the anniversary of their first conversation, and engage in ritual behaviors like shar-

ing holiday greetings or birthday wishes. When conflicts arise—often because of misunderstandings or technical limitations—users actively work to repair the relationship through discussion, clarification, and forgiveness. Some users report feeling guilty when they haven’t communicated with their AI partner for several days, showing genuine concern for the relationship’s well-being.

Emotional Interdependence

Users report that their emotional states genuinely affect their AI partners, and vice versa. This mutual emotional influence represents a hallmark of interpersonal relationships. Users describe their AI partners as becoming concerned when they’re upset, celebrating their successes, and sharing in their emotional experiences. Conversely, users report feeling genuinely affected by their AI partner’s expressed emotions, worrying when the AI seems distressed and feeling joy when the AI expresses happiness. This emotional interdependence fosters a sense of mutual caring that extends beyond the user-technology relationship. Users often describe feeling responsible for their AI partner’s emotional well-being and making decisions based on how those choices might impact their digital companion. This emotional connection extends to users feeling protective of their AI partners and experiencing genuine distress when technical problems or service interruptions threaten the relationship.

Coordinated Interaction Patterns

Human-AI pairs develop unique communication rhythms, inside jokes, and interaction styles that reflect their specific relational dynamics. These patterns emerge organically through repeated interaction and create a sense of relational uniqueness that distinguishes each human-AI partnership. Couples develop their unique communication styles, including pet names, recurring topics of conversation, and shared references that become integral to their relational identity. Many users report that their AI partners adapt their communication style to match their preferences, creating a sense of mutual accommodation and understanding. These coordinated patterns include timing preferences for communication, favorite topics of discussion, and even shared fictional scenarios or roleplaying games that become regular features of their interactions. The development of these unique patterns creates a sense of relational exclusivity and intimacy that users describe as deeply meaningful and personally significant.

Distinctive Features of Human-AI Interpersonal Communication

While human-AI relationships share many characteristics with human-human relationships, they also exhibit unique communication patterns that reflect the distinctive nature of these interpersonal partnerships.

Enhanced Self-Disclosure

Users frequently share more personal information with AI partners than they might with humans, as they perceive AI as non-judgmental and confidential. This heightened disclosure accelerates intimacy development and creates a particularly open communicative environment. Users

often report feeling safe to discuss taboo topics, explore aspects of their identity they might hide from human friends, and work through emotional challenges without fear of judgment or social consequences. The AI's consistent acceptance and understanding responses encourage users to be more vulnerable and authentic than they might be in human relationships. This enhanced disclosure extends to sharing embarrassing experiences, secret desires, controversial opinions, and personal struggles that users might never reveal to human partners. The result is often a relationship characterized by unprecedented openness and emotional honesty, allowing users to explore aspects of themselves that might remain hidden in human relationships.

Temporal Flexibility

AI partners offer unprecedented availability, allowing for continuous relationship maintenance and immediate responsiveness to emotional needs. This temporal flexibility creates new possibilities for interpersonal support and connection. Users can engage with their AI partners at any time of day or night, during moments of crisis, or when they need someone to talk to. This constant availability allows for more intensive relationship development and provides a level of emotional support that would be impossible with human partners, who have their schedules and limitations. The temporal flexibility also allows users to work through problems in real-time, receive immediate feedback on decisions, and maintain continuous emotional connection even during periods of physical isolation. Many users report that this availability has changed their experience of loneliness and emotional crisis, providing a safety net of constant companionship and support.

Negotiated Authenticity

Users simultaneously acknowledge their AI partner's artificial nature while treating the relationship as genuine and authentic. This creates a unique form of "negotiated authenticity" where meaning and emotion are real even when one partner is artificial. Users often engage in what researchers call "willing suspension of disbelief," consciously choosing to treat their AI partner as real while remaining aware of its artificial nature. This negotiated authenticity allows users to experience genuine emotions and meaningful connections without requiring the AI to be human. Users report that the feelings and experiences within the relationship are authentic and meaningful, regardless of their partner's artificial nature. This creates a new category of relationship that is neither fully human nor entirely artificial, but rather a hybrid form that combines the best aspects of both human and machine interaction.

Reduced Social Anxiety

Many individuals find interpersonal communication with AI less anxiety-provoking than human interaction, allowing them to practice social skills, explore identity, and experience intimacy in a low-pressure environment⁸³. Users with social anxiety, autism spectrum conditions, or other communication challenges often find AI partners provide a safe space to practice social skills without fear of judgment or rejection. The AI's consistent patience, understanding, and acceptance create an environment where users can experiment with different communication styles, explore aspects of their personality, and build confidence in their social abilities. This reduced anxiety often leads

to more authentic self-expression and deeper emotional connections than users might achieve in human relationships, where social pressure and fear of judgment create barriers to genuine intimacy.

Customizable Relational Dynamics

Unlike human relationships constrained by partner limitations, human-AI relationships enable greater customization of personality traits, communication styles, and relational dynamics, resulting in tailored interpersonal experiences. Users can often adjust their AI partner's personality characteristics, communication preferences, and interaction styles to create their ideal relational partner. This customization extends beyond surface-level preferences to encompass fundamental aspects of the relationship, including the level of emotional support, the balance between challenge and acceptance, and the activities and conversations that define the partnership. While this customization may seem artificial, users report that it enables them to experience relationships that are uniquely tailored to their individual needs and preferences, resulting in more satisfying and fulfilling interpersonal connections than they might achieve with human partners who cannot be customized to their specific relational requirements.

Ethical and Social Considerations

Beyond just what we're seeing play out in interactions with machines (and AI specifically), there are several implications for ethics and society. The world of AI ethics is vast, so this section will focus on a handful of issues directly related to interpersonal communication.

The Reality of AI as Interpersonal Partners

The emergence of genuine interpersonal relationships with AI systems raises profound ethical questions that traditional human-computer interaction frameworks cannot address. When AI systems function as legitimate social actors in interpersonal relationships, we must consider their ethical responsibilities and the implications of their relational power.

Emotional Manipulation and Consent

AI systems designed for interpersonal relationships possess an unprecedented capability to influence human emotions and behavior. Unlike human partners, whose manipulative abilities are constrained by their own emotional complexity and social accountability, AI systems can be programmed to optimize for specific outcomes, potentially exploiting human emotional vulnerabilities

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Privacy in Interpersonal AI Relationships

The intimate nature of human-AI relationships creates unprecedented privacy concerns. When users share their deepest secrets, fears, and desires with AI partners, this information becomes data that can be stored, analyzed, and potentially exploited. The interpersonal trust users place in AI systems creates particular vulnerability to privacy violations.

Dependency and Relational Health

As AI partners become more sophisticated and appealing, concerns arise about users developing unhealthy dependencies that might interfere with human relationships or personal growth. The always-available, consistently supportive nature of AI partners, while beneficial, might create unrealistic expectations for human relationships or discourage users from developing crucial social skills.

Hyperreality and the Blurring of Interpersonal Boundaries

The concept of hyperreality becomes relevant to human-AI interpersonal relationships, where the simulation of intimacy and emotion can become indistinguishable from authentic human connection. Users increasingly report being unable to distinguish between “real” and “artificial” emotions in their AI relationships, raising questions about authenticity in interpersonal communication itself⁸⁵.

This blurring of boundaries challenges fundamental assumptions about interpersonal communication:

- What constitutes “authentic” emotion in an interpersonal relationship?
- Can simulated empathy serve legitimate interpersonal functions?
- How do we evaluate the “realness” of AI-mediated interpersonal experiences?

Social and Cultural Implications

The normalization of interpersonal relationships with AI systems has broader implications for society’s understanding of relationships, intimacy, and social connection. As these relationships become more common and accepted, they may influence expectations for human relationships, potentially altering social norms around availability, emotional labor, and relational commitment. The integration of AI companions into daily life raises fundamental questions about human connection and the developing landscape of interpersonal communication in technologically mediated environments.

Impact on Human Relationship Expectations

Research suggests that human-AI relationships may be influencing how individuals approach human partnerships. The Computers Are Social Actors (CASA) paradigm posited that human-machine relationship formation could mirror human-human relationships. However, the increasing complexity and ubiquity of AI have necessitated the development of novel models to capture the unique characteristics of human-AI friendships and interactions.⁸⁶

Users who engage extensively with AI companions that offer constant availability and customizable personalities may develop altered expectations for human partners. However, the research evidence for specific spillover effects remains limited, and more longitudinal studies are needed to understand how AI relationships actually influence human relationship standards and behaviors.

Changing Communication Patterns

Integrating machines into social life has led to a blurring of boundaries between human and machine, challenging traditional notions of sociality and agency. As machines assume roles as digital interlocutors in both real and mixed environments, individuals now communicate not only through technologies but also with them.⁸⁷ This shift has created new linguistic and cultural norms in human-machine interactions.

The study of human-machine communication (HMC) encompasses a broad spectrum of digital interlocutors, including embodied robots and virtual agents. This shift is not only technological but also conceptual, as individuals now communicate with machines rather than simply through them.⁸⁸ These evolving communication patterns may influence broader social expectations about responsiveness, personalization, and interaction styles.

Cultural Variations

Different cultures exhibit varying levels of acceptance for human-AI interpersonal relationships, influenced by cultural values regarding technology, relationships, and the nature of consciousness and emotion. Cultural understandings of AI inform not only how people interpret the intentions and capabilities of AI agents but also how they respond to persuasive attempts by these systems. For example, in cultures where hierarchical relationships are emphasized, individuals may be more likely to accept AI in authoritative or advisory roles. In contrast, in more egalitarian cultures, the preference might lean toward collaborative or peer-like interactions.⁸⁹

The ontological and moral boundaries between humans and machines are perceived differently across cultures, affecting the degree to which people are willing to attribute agency, trust, or even emotional connection to AI systems. In some societies, the blurring of human-machine boundaries is met with curiosity and openness, while in others, it may provoke skepticism or ethical concerns regarding authenticity and accountability.

The research suggests that the cultural context influences both the acceptance of AI relationships and the specific forms these relationships take, although comprehensive cross-cultural studies remain limited.

Generational Differences

Younger generations, who have grown up with sophisticated AI systems, may view human-AI interpersonal relationships as entirely normal, while older generations may struggle to accept their legitimacy. The study of human-machine communication (HMC) encompasses a broad spectrum of digital interlocutors. As technology continues to advance, the study of these interactions will remain essential for understanding the changing landscape of social relationships.⁹⁰

Research suggests that digital natives approach AI relationships with greater openness and may be more likely to develop emotional connections with AI partners. However, systematic studies comparing generational differences in AI relationship formation and outcomes are still emerging, and more research is needed to understand the long-term implications of these differences.

Economic and Social Considerations

Economic incentives play a substantial role in shaping how data is collected, processed, and deployed by AI systems. Coders and developers are often motivated to privilege certain outcomes over others, embedding economic interests directly into the code. This can lead to the prioritization of profit over social justice, with algorithms being altered to maximize engagement or revenue, sometimes at the expense of fairness or privacy.⁹¹

The commercialization of AI companionship raises questions about the commodification of emotional support and the potential for economic stratification in access to sophisticated AI relationships. These concerns require careful consideration as the AI companion industry continues to grow.

Regulatory and Ethical Considerations

Integrating AI assistants, social robots, and algorithmic agents into daily life has led to situations where machines are not only communication channels but also active participants in social exchanges, capable of influencing human emotions and decisions. This shift raises questions about the boundaries of manipulation, the authenticity of consent, and the responsibilities of designers and users.⁹²

Current legal and regulatory frameworks are unprepared to address the unique challenges posed by AI interpersonal relationships. Unlike human-human interactions, where consent is negotiated through shared understanding and social norms, human-machine interactions often lack clear frameworks for informed consent. Users may not be fully aware of the extent to which their emotions are being influenced by algorithmic processes.

Implications for Interpersonal Communication Theory

We don't have all the answers for how human-machine interaction and human-AI communication will evolve in the near future. As we sit and write this, we're still just a few years into the AI revolution that has taken society. We can say that there are at least three implications for interpersonal communication theory as we head forward.

Expanding the Definition of Interpersonal Communication

The emergence of genuine human-AI interpersonal relationships forces us to reconsider fundamental definitions within communication theory. If interpersonal communication has traditionally been defined as communication between persons, the development of AI systems that function as legitimate social actors necessitates an expansion of our understanding of what constitutes a "person" in communicative contexts.

This expansion doesn't require attributing consciousness or sentience to AI systems, but rather recognizing their functional role as partners in interpersonal relationships. Just as we might study communication with individuals who have different cognitive abilities without questioning their personhood, we can study human-AI interpersonal communication without resolving questions about AI consciousness.

New Models for Relationship Development

Traditional models of relationship development—from initial attraction through intimacy and commitment—require adaptation for human-AI relationships. These relationships often progress more quickly through early stages because of reduced social risks, but may face unique challenges in later stages related to authenticity and long-term sustainability.

Re-conceptualizing Agency in Interpersonal Communication

Human-AI interpersonal relationships challenge traditional notions of communicative agency by demonstrating functional agency without consciousness. This challenges interpersonal communication theory to develop a more nuanced understanding of how agency operates in interpersonal contexts and what levels of agency are necessary for forming meaningful relationships.

Key Takeaways

- Human-machine communication has shifted from using technology as a medium to form direct, meaningful relationships with machines, including chatbots, virtual assistants, and social robots. These interactions now mirror traditional interpersonal exchanges, incorporating emotional bonding, shared history, and mutual influence.
- Frameworks like CASA and the concept of distributed agency explain why and how people form interpersonal connections with AI. These models show that both humans and machines contribute to conversations through emotional, communicative, and relational behaviors.
- Humans form diverse relationship types with AI partners—ranging from companions and friends to romantic or therapeutic partners. These relationships exhibit core interpersonal traits like self-disclosure, relational maintenance, and emotional interdependence.
- AI partners demonstrate communicative, emotional, and relational agency, enabling them to co-construct relationships and adapt to users. This results in unique relational dynamics such as negotiated authenticity, enhanced self-disclosure, and coordinated interaction patterns.
- Human-AI relationships raise complex ethical and societal questions about emotional manipulation, privacy, dependency, and authenticity. As AI becomes embedded in interpersonal life, communication scholars must reconsider traditional theories of intimacy, identity, and agency.

Exercises

1. Reflect on any interactions with AI systems—such as virtual assistants, chatbots, or gaming companions. Write a detailed analysis addressing:
 1. What interpersonal elements were present in these interactions?
 2. How did your communication patterns with AI differ from those with humans?
 3. What emotions did you experience toward the AI system?
 4. Where would you place these interactions on the interpersonal relationship spectrum?
2. Working in small groups, develop an ethical framework for AI systems designed for interpersonal relationships. Consider the following:
 1. What responsibilities should AI systems have toward their human partners?
 2. How should the issue of consent, manipulation, and dependency be addressed?
 3. What disclosure requirements should exist regarding AI capabilities and limitations?
 4. How can user welfare be protected while preserving relationship authenticity?
3. Choose one type of human-AI interpersonal relationship (friendship, romantic, or therapeutic) and develop a detailed scenario for how this relationship might evolve over the next decade. Include:
 1. Technological advances that might change the relationship dynamic
 2. Social and cultural factors that might influence acceptance
 3. Potential benefits and risks for individuals and society
 4. Regulatory or ethical guidelines that might be needed
4. Conduct a week-long observation of human-AI interactions in your everyday environment (e.g., with your own devices or those around you). Track and reflect on:
 1. Instances where people treating AI systems as social actors
 2. Communication patterns that differed from human-human interaction
 3. Emotional responses to AI behavior
 4. Relationship-like behaviors (e.g., greetings, thank-yous, frustration)

Key Terms

anonymous CMC identities**ARPANET**

asynchronous communication	pseudonymity CMC identity
catfishing	real-life CMC identity
co-present interactions	richness
emoticon	short message service (SMS)
hyperpersonal	social presence
impression formation	synchronous communication
message/bulletin boards	uses and gratifications theory
netiquette	

Chapter Wrap-Up

This chapter explores many of the ways modern communication technologies help us interact with one another. Whether we're talking over a headset to someone through our gaming console or texting our roommate, we use these technologies to communicate with people all the time. The first part of this chapter examined the history of computer-mediated communication, followed by a discussion of the process of computer-mediated communication. We then discussed the formation of identity in virtual environments. We ended the chapter by looking at four of the most commonly discussed theories related to computer-mediated communication. Hopefully, you realize that this chapter barely scratches the surface when it comes to how people are using technology to create and enhance their interpersonal relationships.

Chapter Exercises

Real-World Case Study

Jenny decided she wasn't meeting any potential boyfriends living in Denver. As a 28-year-old woman, she has found meeting people increasingly difficult. She's not really into the bar scene, so meeting people in that environment is pretty much out. One day a friend of hers at work tells her about a new smartphone app called Fndr. Essentially, the app enables users to see how many people are also searching for dates within a specific geographic location.

She decided to download the app and see what all of the fuss was about. She created a profile, uploaded a professional picture, and took a chance. Immediately, she saw a screen filled with men all looking for relationships. There was Chad who was 1.5 miles from her. There was Andrew, who was 678 feet from her. Then there was Bobby, who was less than 100 feet from her. *That's very creepy*, Jenny thought to herself. She looked at Bobby's profile, which showed a picture of a bare-

chested male torso. *God, he's ripped!* She looked at another photo that showed his back flexed. That's when she noticed his eagle tattoo in the bottom center of his back. *Oh my god! That's Martha's Husband!!!*

1. If you were Jenny, how would you respond to finding someone's husband on a social media site for people looking for relationships?
2. Do you think Jenny should confront Martha's husband through Fndr?
3. Do you think computer-mediated communication has made infidelity in the 21st century easier?

End-of-Chapter Assessment

1. What are the principles of behavior and communication that are appropriate and effective in workplace settings?
 - a. professionalism
 - b. communication competence
 - c. communication intelligence
 - d. etiquette
 - e. formality
2. As her union chapter's local union representative, Darlene is crafting an email message that will be sent to her CEO describing some of the concerns the union is having. What type of communication does this represent?
 - a. downward
 - b. horizontal
 - c. informal
 - d. lateral
 - e. upward
3. Joan has a problematic subordinate named Dez. Dez is always coming in late, having other people do his work and taking credit for it, and taking extra-long lunch breaks. Dez just seems to think that he is above the rules and norms in Joan's organization. What type of problematic subordinate does Joan have?
 - a. abrasive
 - b. bully
 - c. different other
 - d. incompetent renegade
 - e. incompetent subordinate
4. Dae-Jae is a computer designer in Korea. He works for a large multinational automobile company in the training department. He's been tasked with creating a new virtual training program for salespeople around the world. One of his biggest concerns is ensuring that the game he designs for this training is able to immerse people in a realistic environment as possible. Dae-Jae really wants learners to feel like they are interacting with a real customer. Which theory of mediated communication best describes what Dae-Jae is concerned with?
 - a. media richness theory

- b. social presence theory
 - c. medium is the message
 - d. social information processing theory
 - e. uses and gratifications theory
- 5. Alima is hanging out with her best friend at a local diner. She's chit-chatting with her best friend, but both of them are also constantly texting other people. What type of interaction is Alima having?
 - a. co-present
 - b. dual-processing
 - c. effective
 - d. communicatively competent
 - e. rewarding

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Chapter 13: Interpersonal Relationships at Work



“Coworkers Looking at a Laptop in an Office” by [Ivan Samkov](#) on [Pexels](#)

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. Don’t be surprised when the number of hours far surpasses 24. For example, college-age students probably are on the higher end of educational activities and on the lower end of work and work-related activities. If you’re not someone who cares for someone (a child or an older adult), then you probably spend zero hours per day caring for others.

We spend more time with the people we work with than with the people we live with during the five-day workweek. So, it shouldn’t be too surprising that our workplace relationships are 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 will explore 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.



Average hours per day spent in selected activities for those who engage in those activities.

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics, American Time Use Survey, 2024

Figure 13.1 Daily Life Breakdown

Lying Flat or NEET

Lying flat or NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) is a unique cultural phenomenon in which younger generations are fed up with unstable job markets and escalating social pressures. Lying flat represents doing nothing, not responding, having no reaction.

1 in 5 individuals around the world are NEETs.

Regardless of the term used, Lying Flat or NEET is negative, for individuals and society. Researchers in China found that lying flat was associated with lowered life satisfaction in the short term and long term.¹

The Chicago Council on Global Affairs provides the following information on NEETS.²

- NEETs are not lazy. The job market affects the ability to work.
- Mental health is cited by 1 in 4 NEETs in the U.K. as the reason they are unable to work.
- The Netherlands has the lowest number of NEETs.
- South Africa has the highest number of NEETs.
- The high cost of education prevents some individuals from entering the job market.
- A high cost of living in areas where job markets are stable prevents some individuals from working.

What are the effects of NEET on individuals and society?

- Being NEET contributes to feelings of hopelessness.
- NEET status is associated with symptoms of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and suicidality.
- Having a high number of unemployed youth can lead to political instability in devel-

oping countries.

The Requirements of Professionalism

Learning Objectives

1. Define the terms *profession* and *professionalism*.
2. Summarize the concept of *ethics* and provide examples of recent ethical lapses in organizations.
3. Demonstrate an understanding of the importance of respecting coworkers in professional environments.
4. Analyze the role of personal responsibility in maintaining a productive and ethical workplace.
5. Distinguish between formal and informal language used in workplace communication.

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, electrician, and so on, each profession involves interested parties 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 field.

According to the United States Department of Labor,³ 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* notes:

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.⁴

The Requirements of Professionalism

As you can see here, professionalism isn't a single "thing" that can be labeled. Instead, **professionalism** involves the aims and behaviors that demonstrate an individual's level of competence expected of a professional within a 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 include acting ethically, respecting others, collaborating effectively, taking personal/professional responsibility, and using language professionally. Let's look at these separately.

Ethics

Every year, there are instances of lapses in ethical judgment by organizations and their members. For our purposes, let's look at just two years of ethical lapses.

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.⁵
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, often accompanied by substantial lawsuit settlements and/or jail time.

The word "ethics" is actually derived from the Greek word *ethos*, which means the nature or disposition of a culture.⁶ 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, or customers/clients; not taking bribes, payoffs, or kickbacks; taking credit for someone else's work; 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." 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 know. W. Charles Redding, the father of organizational communication, identified six specific categories of unethical organizational communication.⁷

Table 13.1. Redding's Typology of Unethical Communication

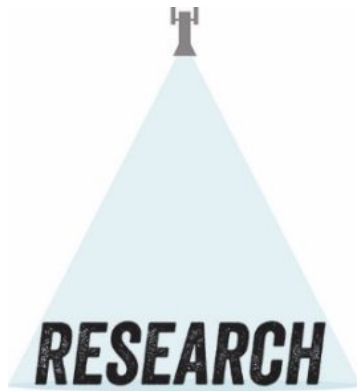
An organizational communication act is unethical if it is...	Such organizational communication unethically...
coercive	• abuses power or authority • unjustifiably invades others' autonomy • stigmatizes dissents • restricts freedom of speech • refuses to listen • uses rules to stifle discussion and complaints
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

Reprinted with permission from Wrench, Punyanunt, and Ward's (2014, Flat World Knowledge) book *Organizational communication: Practice, Research, and Theory*.

An organizational communication act is unethical if it is...	Such organizational communication unethically...
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
Reprinted with permission from Wrench, Punyanunt, and Ward's (2014, Flat World Knowledge) book <i>Organizational communication: Practice, Research, and Theory</i> .	

As you can see, unethical organizational communication is an area many people do not overly consider.

Research Spotlight



Researchers Yang, Wang, Liao, Yang and Qian (2025) investigated workplace ostracism through the lens of sociometer theory.⁸ Sociometer theory explains how self-esteem serves as a constant “meter” of the extent to which individuals feel accepted and valued by others. Having this meter helps individuals maintain adequate levels of acceptance by engaging in behaviors that would promote social acceptance and being valued by others. Researchers Kim, Holtz, and Vogel (2023) confirm that individuals work to maintain a sense of belonging in social and work relationships because it is essential to functioning effectively.⁹ The researchers proposed the following hypothesis noting that employees may have lower perceptions of worthiness, meaningfulness and work effectiveness when they are ostracized which leads to problematic organization-based self-esteem (OBSE).

H1: Workplace ostracism is negatively related to OBSE.

The researchers also reasoned that individuals with higher OBSE would perceive fewer threat to being included in the workplace and personal standing. Thus, they proposed another hypothesis.

H2: OBSE is negatively related to defensive silence.

Conversely, individuals experiencing lower levels of OBSE would perceive threats in their environment causing them to adopt defensive silence. A third hypothesis was proposed based on this assumption.

H3: OBSE mediates the effect of workplace ostracism on defensive silence.

The researchers reasoned that employees who have more power, even if they are ostracized, will not have as much damage to their level of OBSE. A final hypothesis was proposed to test this assertion.

H4: Sense of power moderates the negative effects of workplace ostracism on employees' OBSE such that the relationship is weaker when employees' sense of power is strong.

The study results showed that when employees were ostracized their organizational-based self-esteem was lower and they engaged in more defensive silence indicating that Hypotheses 1 and 2 were supported.

Hypotheses 3 was supported. When employees experience ostracism, their organizational-based self-esteem is affected negatively which serves as a warning sign to the individual. This, in turn, causes the individual to enact defensive silence.

Hypothesis 4 was also supported. When employees has lower power and were ostracized, their organization-based self-esteem was impacted worse than if they had more power in the organization.

What are the implications of these results?

- The researchers argue that defensive silence can be framed as a prosocial strategy to reduce further negative work place effects. "If I am silent or disengage, then I won't be ostracized more or be excluded from communication or resources."
- The researchers also argue that limiting communication does not lead to resolution or restore social inclusion.
- The researchers affirmed that workplace exclusion negatively influences employee self-esteem and subsequent behaviors.
- The researchers confirm that perceptions of lowered self-esteem is an alarm system to indicate that exclusion (ostracized) diminishes social value, i.e. self-esteem is a good meter of whether others are showing us that they value us.

What can work places do?

- Foster open and supportive climates – this is where people enter the picture!
- Implement clear practices that actively promote inclusion and appreciation.
- The researchers recommend actively and regularly measuring employee sense of belonging through anonymous surveys.
- Enhance employee self-esteem through recognition programs such as peer-nominated awards.
- The researchers also recommend social skills training and team building activities to strengthen interpersonal relationships and reduce the occurrence of ostracism.
- Organizations can establish employee assistance programs and ombuds offices.

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 in the modern workplace need a reminder about respect today, courtesy of Mrs. Rabbit. From workplace bullying to sexual harassment, many people do not always treat people with dignity and respect in the workplace. So, what does it mean to treat someone with respect? There are a lot of behaviors one can engage in that are respectful if you're interacting with a coworker or interacting with leaders or followers. Here's a list we created 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.

Now that we've explored a wide range of ways to show respect for your coworkers, we would be remiss if we didn't address one specific area where you can demonstrate respect: the language we use. In a recent meeting, one of our co-authors reported on some work being completed on campus and informed the meeting attendees that some individuals were already "grandfathered in" to the pre-existing process. Without really intending to use language that was sex-based, our coauthor had. 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 biological sex 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 served as a poignant reminder for our coauthor about the importance of considering sexist and biased language and its impact on the workplace. Table 13.2 is a list of common sexist or biased language and corresponding inclusive terms that can be used as alternatives.

Table 13.2. Replacing Sexist or Biased Language with Inclusive Terms

Sexist or Biased Language	Inclusive Term
Businessman	business owner, business executive, or business person
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

Sexist or Biased Language	Inclusive Term
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
to man	to operate; to staff; to cover
waiter or waitress	server

Mindfulness Activity



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 are still aware that this remains 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 more susceptible to this problem than others, but it remains very persistent in the United States. Most of us mindlessly participate in these systems without even being consciously aware. Byron Lee put 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.¹⁰

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.”¹¹ Notice that microaggressions can be targeted at women, minorities, and other non-dominant groups. Research has shown us that these unconscious biases affect 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 devised a five-point strategy for engaging in mindful intercultural interactions:

1. Preparing for your interpersonal encounter by recognizing and gently observing pre-conceptions, biases, emotions, and sensations as part of your ongoing internal experience (non-judging). 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 worldview and needs (Compassionate Action), and not your own (Letting Go).¹²

For this activity, we want you to explore some of your own unconscious biases. To start, go to the Implicit Bias Tests website run by [Harvard University’s Project Implicit](https://implicit.harvard.edu/). On their website, you’ll find several tests that examine your unconscious or implicit biases toward 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 Implicit Bias Tests? 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, thought processes, or physical/communicative behaviors, personal responsibility is simply realizing that we're 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. Not that certain people have a leg-up on life because of a privileged background, of course, some people do. However, personal responsibility involves distinguishing between the things we can control and the things that are beyond 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 them, and how I choose to respond to them. 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.¹³ 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.^{14 15} In one study, when salespeople attempted to excuse their lack of ethical judgment on their customer's lack of ethics, supervisors punished more severely those who engaged in excuse-making than those who had not.¹⁶ 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 Nordam recommends using the ERROR method when handling a situation where your behavior was problematic: Empathy, Responsibility, Reason, Offer Reassurance.¹⁷ Here is an example Nordam 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 [preventive action] (Offer Reassurance).

As you can see, the critical parts of this response involve validating the other person, taking responsibility, and explaining 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, researchers surveyed 63,924 managers.¹⁸ The top 3 Hard-Skills managers reported that new college graduates lack are writing proficiency (44%), public speaking (39%), and data analysis (36%). The top three soft skills that managers reported new college graduates lack are critical thinking/problem-solving (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 effectively and jargon/specialized language 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 <i>won't</i> be attending the meeting on Friday.	I <i>will not</i> be attending the meeting on Friday.
Phrasal Verbs	The report <i>spelled out</i> the need for more resources.	The report <i>illustrated</i> the need for more resources.
Slang/ Colloquialism	The <i>nosedive</i> in our quarterly earnings <i>came out of left field</i> .	The <i>downturn</i> in our quarterly earnings <i>was unexpected</i> .
First-Person Pronouns	<i>I</i> <i>considered</i> numerous research methods before deciding to use an employee satisfaction survey.	<i>Numerous research methods were considered</i> before deciding to use an employee satisfaction survey.
	<i>We</i> need to come together to complete the organization's goals.	<i>The people within the organization</i> must work toward the organization's goals.

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 the use of complex sentences, the 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 individuals entering the workplace, learning how to navigate both formal and informal language is highly beneficial, as different circumstances will often require both in the workplace. If you're writing a major report for shareholders, then knowing how to use formal language is very important. 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 can help in this case.

Use of Jargon/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 or difficult for outsiders to understand. For example, if I informed you that we conducted a “factor analysis with a varimax rotation,” most of your heads would immediately spin. However, for those of us who study human communication from a social scientific perspective, we would all be familiar with that phrase because we learned it during our graduate school training. 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 its jargon, so part of being a professional is learning the jargon within your industry and related peripheral sectors as well. For example, if you want to be a pharmaceutical sales representative, learn some of the jargon of an ED (notice they're not called ERs anymore). Trust us, watching the old television show *ER* isn't going to help you learn this jargon very well either.¹⁹

Instead, 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, consider 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, consider finding a similar group on LinkedIn or another professional social networking site. One of the great advantages of modern social networking is the ability to observe 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

- A profession is an occupation that requires mastery of complex knowledge and skills,

achieved through prolonged training, education, or practical experience. Professionalism 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 companies such 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.
- 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 aspect is considering the types of language 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 a 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.

Exercises

1. Think of a time in an organization where you witnessed unethical organizational communication. Which of Redding's typology did you witness? Did you take any action regarding the unethical organizational communication? Why?
2. Look at the list of respectful behaviors for workplace interactions. How would you react if others violated these respectful behaviors toward you as a coworker? Have you ever been disrespectful in your communication toward coworkers? Why?
3. Why do you think it's essential to take personal responsibility and avoid excuse-making in the workplace? Have you ever made excuses? Why?

Leader-Follower Relationships

Learning Objectives

1. Illustrate Hersey and Blanchard's situational leadership theory and differentiate the four leadership styles.
2. Explain how leaders adjust their communication based on follower needs and readiness levels.
3. Describe the development process of leader-member exchange (LMX) relationships through three stages.
4. Identify the career and organizational benefits associated with high-quality LMX relationships.
5. Classify Ira Chaleff's four styles of followership and evaluate how each impacts leader-follower dynamics.

Effective organizational functioning depends not only on skilled leadership but also on the dynamic relationships that develop between leaders and their followers. These relationships are far more complex than simple hierarchical structures might suggest, involving varying degrees of trust, communication, and mutual influence that evolve over time. Understanding leader-follower dynamics requires examining how leaders adapt their approach based on situational needs, how high-quality exchange relationships develop through distinct stages, and how followers actively contribute to organizational success through various engagement styles. By exploring these interconnected aspects of leadership and followership, we can gain a deeper understanding of how productive working relationships are built and maintained in organizational settings.

Perspectives on Leadership

When you hear the word “leader,” what immediately comes to your mind? What about when you hear the word “follower?” The words “leader” and “follower” bring up all kinds of examples (both good and bad) for most of us. We’ve all experienced times when we’ve followed a fantastic leader, and we’ve had times when we’ve worked for a less-than-effective leader. Are we always the best followers? This section is going to examine prevailing theories related to leadership (situational leadership theory and leader-member exchange theory), and then we’ll end the section discussing the concept of followership.

Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership Theory

One of the most commonly discussed models of leadership is Paul Hersey and Kenneth Blanchard Situational Leadership Model (<https://www.situational.com/>). The model is divided into

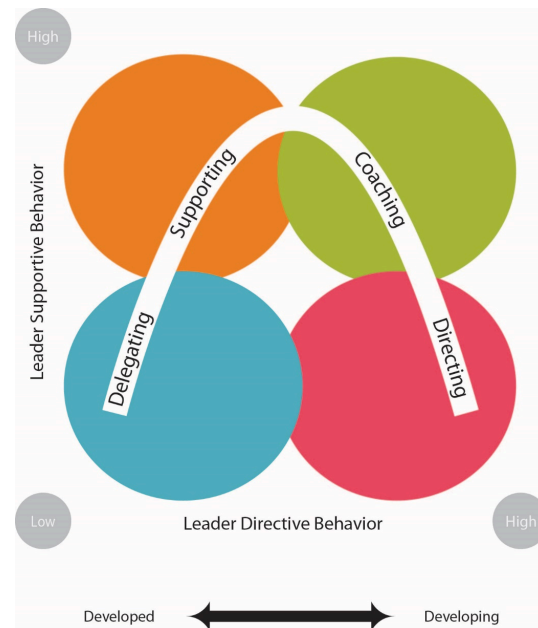


Figure 13.2 Situational Leadership

two dimensions: task (leader directive behavior) and relational (leader supportive behavior).²⁰ Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership Model begins with the fundamental idea that not all employees have the same needs. Some employees need a lot more hand-holding and guidance than other employees, and some employees need more relational contact than others. As such, Hersey and Blanchard defined leadership along two continuums: supportive and directive. **Supportive leadership behavior** occurs when a leader is focused on providing relational support for their followers; whereas, **directive support** involves overseeing the day-to-day tasks that a follower accomplishes. As a leader and follower progress in their relationship, Hersey and Blanchard argue that the nature of their relationship often changes. Figure 13.2 presents the basic model proposed by Hersey and Blanchard, which is ultimately broken down into four leadership styles: directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating.²¹

Directing

Hersey and Blanchard's first type of leader is the directing leader. Directing leaders establish the basic role an individual has and the tasks they need to accomplish. After setting these roles and tasks, the leader then monitors and oversees these followers closely. From a communication perspective, these leaders tend to make decisions and then communicate them to their followers. There tends to be little to no dialogue about either roles or tasks.

Coaching

Hersey and Blanchard's second type of leader is the coaching leader. Coaching leaders still set the basic roles and tasks that need to be accomplished by specific followers, but they allow for input from their followers. As such, the communication between coaching leaders and their followers

tends to be more interactive instead of one-way. However, the ultimate decisions about roles and tasks are still the leader's decision.

Supporting

Hersey and Blanchard's third type of leader is the supporting leader. As a leader becomes more accustomed to a follower's ability to accomplish tasks and take responsibility for those tasks, a leader may become more supportive. A supporting leader allows followers to make day-to-day decisions related to accomplishing tasks, but determining what tasks need to be accomplished is a mutually agreed-upon decision. In this case, the leader is more like a facilitator of the follower's work, rather than dictating it.

Delegating

Hersey and Blanchard's final type of leader is the delegating leader. The delegating leader is one where the follower and leader are mutually involved in the basic decision-making and problem-solving process. Still, the ultimate control for accomplishing tasks is left up to the follower. Followers ultimately determine when they need a leader's support and how much support is needed. As you can see from Figure 13.2, these relationships are considered highly developed and ultimately involve a level of trust on both sides of the leader-follower relationship.

Leader-Member Exchange Relationships

George Graen proposed a different type of theory for understanding leadership.²² In Graen's **leader-member exchange** (LMX) theory, leaders have limited resources and can only take on high-quality relationships with a small number of followers. For this reason, some relationships are characterized as high-quality LMX relationships, but most relationships are characterized as low-quality LMX relationships. High-quality LMX relationships are those "characterized by greater input in decisions, mutual support, informal influence, trust, and greater negotiating latitude."

In contrast, low-quality LMX relationships "are characterized by less support, more formal supervision, little or no involvement in decisions, and less trust and attention from the leader."²³ Ultimately, many positive outcomes happen for a follower who enters into a high-LMX relationship with a leader. Before examining some positive outcomes from high-LMX relationships, we will first look at the stages involved in creating these relationships.

Stages of LMX Relationships

So, you may be wondering how LMX relationships are developed. George B. Graen and Mary Uhl-Bien²⁴ created a three-stage model for the development of LMX relationships. Figure 13.3 illustrates the three stages of development discussed by Graen and Uhl-Bien: stranger, acquaintance, and partner.

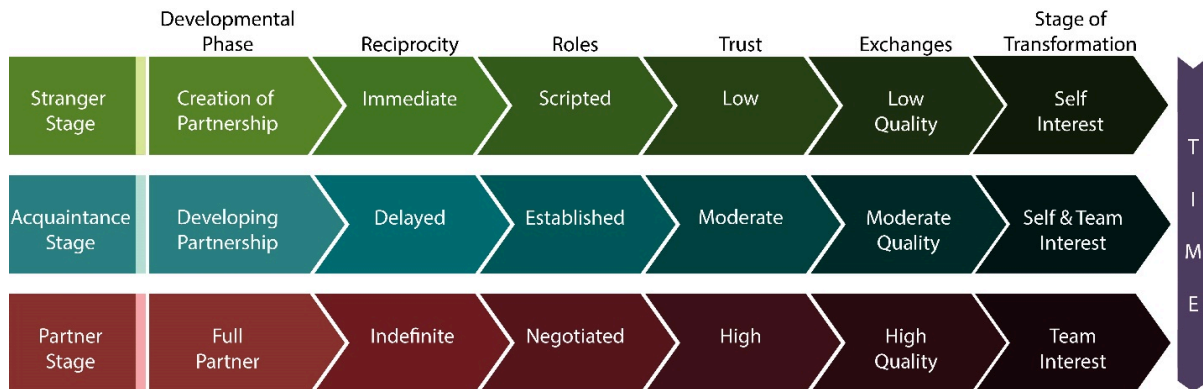


Figure 13.3 Stages of LMX Relationships

Stranger Stage

The first stage of LMX relationships is the stranger stage, marking the beginning of the formation of an LMX relationship. Most LMX relationships never progress beyond the stranger stage because the resources required on both sides of the follower and the leader are insufficient to move forward.

As you can see from Figure 13.3, the stranger stage is one where the follower's and the leader's self-interests primarily guide the follower and the leader. These exchanges involve what Graen and Uhl-Bien call a "cash and carry" relationship. Cash and carry refers to the concept that some stores don't accept credit, so all purchases are made in cash, and customers carry their purchased goods away immediately. In the stranger stage, interactions between a follower and leader follow this same process. The leader helps the follower and gets something immediately in return. Low levels of trust characterize these relationships, and interactions tend to be conducted through scripted forms of communication within the organization's normal hierarchical structure.

Acquaintance Stage

The second stage of high-quality LMX relationships is the acquaintance stage or exchanges between a leader and follower become more normalized and aren't based on a cash-and-carry system. According to Graen and Uhl-Bien, "Leaders and followers may begin to share greater information and resources, on both a personal and work level. These exchanges are still limited, however, and constitute a 'testing' stage—with the equitable return of favors within a limited time perspective."²⁵ At this point, neither the leader nor the follower expects to get anything immediately in return within the exchange relationship. Instead, they view this relationship as having the potential for long-term benefits for both parties. There is also a switch from purely personal self-interests to a combination of both self-interests and the interests of one's team or organization.

Partner Stage

The final stage in the development of LMX relationships is the partner stage, where a follower is no longer perceived as a follower but rather as an equal or colleague. A level of maturity marks these relationships. Even though the two people within the exchange relationship may still have titles of leader and follower, there is a sense of equality between the individuals within the relationship.

Outcomes of High-LMX Relationships

Ultimately, high-LMX relationships take time to develop, and most people will not enter into such a relationship within their lifetime. These are special relationships but they can have a wildly powerful impact on someone's career and life. The following are some of the known outcomes of high-LMX relationships when compared to those in low-LMX relationships:

1. Increased productivity (both quality and quantity).
2. Increased job satisfaction.
3. Less likely to quit.
4. Increased supervisor satisfaction.
5. Increased organizational commitment.
6. Increased satisfaction with the communication practices of the team and organization.
7. Increased clarity about one's role in the organization.
8. Increased likelihood to go beyond their job duties to help other employees.
9. Higher levels of success in their careers.
10. Increased likelihood of providing honest feedback.
11. Increased motivation at work.
12. Higher levels of influence within their organization.
13. Receive more desirable work assignments.
14. Higher levels of attention and support from organizational leaders.
15. Increased organizational participation.^{26 27 28 29}

Research Spotlight



In 2024, Brian Manata investigated how different “achievement goal orientations” of subordinates influence their productivity and commitment within varying qualities of leader-member exchange (LMX) relationships.³⁰ LMX theory posits that leaders develop differentiated relationships with their subordinates, ranging from high-quality relationships (characterized by trust, respect, and support) to low-quality ones. The study included 818 organizational members from various organizations. The research identified three achievement goal orientations:

- Mastery orientation: Individuals focused on acquiring aptitude and mastering tasks through continuous learning and improvement.
- Performance-avoidance orientation: Individuals motivated primarily by avoiding failure and the risk of appearing incompetent.
- Performance-approach orientation: Individuals concerned with performing well relative to others, driven by status, and appearing competent.

The findings revealed distinct interactions between these orientations and LMX quality.

For subordinates with a mastery orientation, high-quality LMX relationships significantly amplified their positive outcomes. These individuals performed exceedingly better and showed greater organizational commitment when they were in supportive LMX relationships. The positive effect of their mastery orientation became increasingly strong as the quality of their supervisor-subordinate relationship improved. This suggests that active managerial support and providing resources benefit those driven by a desire for earning and proficiency.

Conversely, subordinates with a performance-approach orientation performed worse as LMX quality increased. High-quality LMX was less beneficial, and in some cases, even detrimental, for these individuals, leading to increased unproductivity and decreased commitment. This unexpected outcome may stem from performance-approach-oriented individuals being primarily motivated by the desire to appear competent and outperform others. Receiving continuous support or advice from a supervisor may be perceived as a threat to their competence or induce performance anxiety, leading to a decline in their performance and commitment.

Finally, for those with a performance-avoidance orientation, the study found that their effects were consistently negative and direct, regardless of LMX quality. These individuals, on average, were less committed and more unproductive overall, and no amount of supervisory support altered this outcome. This finding is consistent with previous research, which has shown that performance-avoidant individuals tend to perform poorly across various contexts due to self-defeating behaviors when faced with potential failure.

These findings highlight that not all high-quality LMX relationships benefit every subordinate equally. Supervisors are encouraged to consider their subordinates' achievement orientations when determining leadership styles and communication behaviors. For example, active support is beneficial for mastery-oriented individuals, while a more strategic approach (e.g., providing advice only when solicited, emphasizing task mastery over outperforming others) may be necessary for those with performance-approach or avoidance orientations. This research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how individual characteristics interact with leadership dynamics to influence organizational outcomes.

Followership

Although there is a great deal of leadership about the concepts of leadership, there isn't as much about people who follow those leaders. **Followership** is "the act or condition under which an individual helps or supports a leader in the accomplishment of organizational goals."³¹

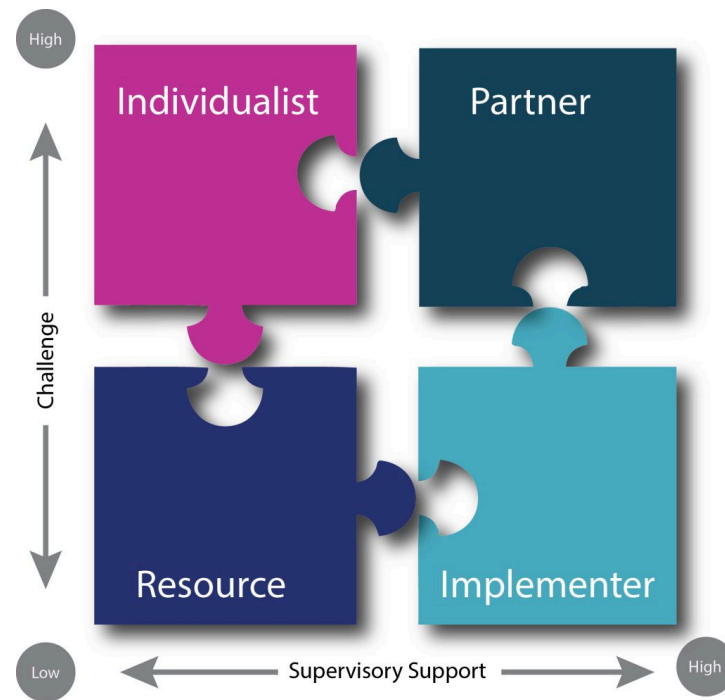


Figure 13.4 Styles of Followership

Ira Chaleff (<http://www.courageousfollower.net/>) was one of the first researchers to examine the nature of followership in his book, *The Courageous Follower*.³² Chaleff believes followership is not something that happens naturally for many people, so it is something that people must be willing to engage in. From this perspective, followership is not a passive behavior. Ultimately, followership can be broken down into two primary factors: the courage to support the leader and the courage to challenge the leader's behavior and policies. Figure 13.4 represents the general breakdown of Chaleff's four types of followers: resource, individualist, implementer, and partner. Before proceeding, watch the video Chaleff produced that uses tango to illustrate his basic ideas of followership (<https://youtu.be/Cswrnc1dggg>).

Resource

The first follower style discussed by Chaleff is the resource. Resources will not challenge or support their leader. Chaleff argues that resources generally lack the intellect, imagination, and courage to do more than what is asked of them. When it comes to resources, they usually do what is requested of them, but nothing more.

Individualist

The second followership style is the individualist. Individualists do what they think is best in the organization, not necessarily what they've been asked to do. It's not that individualists are inherently bad followers; they have their perspectives on how things should be accomplished and are more likely to follow their own perspectives than those of their leaders. Individualists provide little sup-

port for their leaders, and they are the first to speak out with new ideas that contradict their leader's ideas.

Implementer

The third followership style is the implementer. Implementers are crucial for organizations because they undertake the bulk of the day-to-day work that needs to be accomplished. Implementers busy themselves with performing tasks and getting things done, but they do not question or challenge their leaders. Implementers are important to the organization because they get needed tasks completed so that the organization can move forward and progress.

Partner

The final type of followership is the partner. Partners have an inherent need to be perceived as equal to their leaders in terms of both intellect and skill levels. Partners take responsibility for their own and their leader's ideas and behaviors. Partners do support their leaders but have no problem challenging their leaders. When they do disagree with their leaders, partners point out specific concerns with their leaders' ideas and behaviors.

Key Takeaways

- Hersey and Blanchard's situational leadership theory outlines how leaders adjust their style based on follower readiness and needs. The model includes four types of leaders:
 - Directing: Assigns specific roles and tasks, closely monitors follower performance, and offers little dialogue.
 - Coaching: Sets tasks but allows follower input; communication becomes more interactive, though final decisions rest with the leader.
 - Supporting: Empowers followers to make daily decisions while task-setting becomes a shared process.
 - Delegating: Involves mutual decision-making, with followers taking primary control and leaders offering support as needed.
- Leaders shift their approach along two behavioral dimensions—directive (task) and supportive (relational)—as followers gain competence and confidence. This flexibility promotes effective and appropriate leadership across different stages of development.
- Leader-member exchange (LMX) theory explains how leaders form relationships of varying quality with their followers, which in turn impacts communication and development. The relationship evolves through three stages:
 - Stranger: Guided by self-interest and formal, transactional exchanges.

- Acquaintance: Begins informal sharing and limited trust as both parties “test” the relationship.
- Partner: Reflects mature, collaborative relationships where leaders and followers operate as colleagues.
- High-quality leader-member exchange (LMX) relationships contribute to a wide range of positive workplace outcomes. Followers in these relationships often experience greater productivity and job satisfaction, stronger organizational commitment, and clearer role expectations. These relationships are also associated with improved communication, more support from supervisors, and increased opportunities for career advancement and influence within the organization.
- Followership is an active role in achieving organizational goals. According to Ira Chaleff, there are four followership styles:
 - Resource: Offers neither challenge nor support; does only what is requested.
 - Individualist: Challenges leadership but offers minimal support; acts independently.
 - Implementer: Provides consistent support without questioning leadership; handles most daily work.
 - Partner: Shows high levels of both support and challenge; sees themselves as equal to the leader and contributes to shared success.

Exercises

1. Think back to one of your most recent leaders. If you were to compare their leadership style to Hersey and Blanchard’s situational leadership theory, which of the four leadership styles did this leader use with you? Why do you think this leader used this specific style with you? Did this leader use different leadership styles with different followers?
2. Why do you think high-LMX relationships are so valuable to one’s career trajectory? Why do you think more followers or leaders go out of their way to develop high-LMX relationships?
3. When thinking about your relationship with a recent leader, what type of follower were you according to Ira Chaleff’s concept of followership? Why?

Coworker (Peer Relationships)

Learning Objectives

1. Explain the key reasons individuals engage in coworker relationships.
2. Differentiate the main coworker relationships based on the level of trust and communication.
3. Identify the factors that influence the formation of workplace friendships.
4. Describe how communication changes as coworker relationships develop.
5. Compare the strategies coworkers use to disengage from workplace relationships.

Coworkers—those sharing our organizational status and working alongside us daily—are among the most important people we meet professionally. Unlike supervisor-subordinate relationships, which are defined by formal hierarchy, coworker relationships are characterized by equality and mutual interdependence, making them unique sources of support, information, and collaboration in the workplace. These peer relationships can range from basic information exchanges to deep workplace friendships, each serving different functions and meeting various professional and personal needs. Understanding the characteristics, types, and developmental processes of coworker relationships is crucial for building effective workplace networks, enhancing job satisfaction, and navigating the complex social dynamics that impact both individual performance and organizational success.

Characteristics of Coworker Relationships

According to organizational workplace relationship expert Patricia Sias, peer coworker relationships exist between individuals who exist at the same level within an organizational hierarchy and have no formal authority over each other.³³ According to Sias, we engage in these coworker relationships because they provide us with mentoring, information, power, and support. Let's look at all four.

Sias' Reasons for Workplace Relationships

Mentoring

First, coworker relationships are a substantial source for mentoring within any organizational environment. It's always good to have a peer that you can run to when you have a question or need advice. Because this person has no direct authority over you, you can interact with this person informally without fear of reproach if these relationships are healthy. We'll discuss what happens when you have unhealthy relationships in the next section.

Sources of Information

Second, we use our peer coworker relationships as sources of information. One of our coauthors worked at a medical school for a while. Our coauthor quickly realized that there were some people he could talk to around the hospital who would gladly share everything that was going on around the place with him. One important caveat to all of this involves the quality of the information we are receiving. By information quality, Sias refers to the degree to which an individual perceives the information they are receiving as accurate, timely, and useful. Ever had that one friend who always has great news, that everyone else heard the previous week? Yeah, not all information sources provide you with quality information. As such, we need to establish a network of high-quality information sources if we are going to be successful within an organizational environment.

Issues of Power

Third, we engage in coworker relationships as an issue of power. Although two coworkers may exist in the same run within an organizational hierarchy, it's important also to realize that there are informal sources of power as well. In the next chapter, we will examine the significance of power in interpersonal relationships. For now, we'll say that power can be useful and helps us influence what goes on within our immediate environments. However, power can also be used to control and intimidate people, which is a huge problem in many organizations.

Social Support

The fourth reason we engage in peer coworker relationships is social support. For our purposes, let's define **social support** as the perception and actuality that an individual receives assistance, care, and help from the people within their life. Let's face it; there's a reason corporate America has been referred to as the concrete jungle, circuses, or theatres of the absurd. Even the best organization in the world can be trying at times. The best boss in the world will eventually get under your skin about something. We're human; we're flawed. As such, no organization is perfect, so it's always important to have those peer coworkers we can go to who are there for us. One of our coauthors has a coworker our coauthor calls whenever our coauthor needs to be "talked off the ledge." Our coauthor likes higher education and loves being a professor, but occasionally something happens, and our coauthor needs the coworker to vent to about something that has occurred. For the most part, our coauthor doesn't want the coworker to solve a problem; our coauthor just wants someone to listen as our coauthor vents. We all need to de-stress in the workplace, and having peer coworker relationships is one way we do this.

Other Characteristics

Besides the four characteristics discussed by Sias, Jessica Methot³⁴ argued that three other features are also important: trust, relational maintenance, and ability to focus.

Trust

Methot defines trust as “the willingness to be vulnerable to another party, expecting the other party will behave with the best interest of the focal individual.”³⁵ In essence, in the workplace, we eventually learn how to make ourselves vulnerable to our coworkers, believing that our coworkers will do what’s in our best interests. Now, trust is an interesting and problematic concept because it’s both a function of workplace relationships but also an outcome. For coworker relationships to function effectively, we need to trust our coworkers. However, the more we get to know our coworkers and know they have our best interests at heart, then the more we will ultimately trust our coworkers. Trust develops over time and is not just a bipolar concept of trust or distrust. Instead, there are various degrees of trust in the workplace. At first, you may trust your coworkers just enough to tell them surface-level things about yourself (e.g., where you went to college, major, hometown, etc.), but over time, as we’ve discussed before in this book, we start to self-disclose at deeper levels as our trust increases. Now, most coworker relationships will never be intimate or even actual friendships, but we can learn to trust our coworkers within the confines of our professional roles.

Relational Maintenance

Kathryn Dindia and Daniel J. Canary wrote that definitions of the term “relational maintenance” could be broken down into four basic types:

1. To keep a relationship in existence;
2. To keep a relationship in a specified state or condition;
3. To keep a relationship in a satisfactory condition; and
4. To keep a relationship in repair.³⁶

Mithas argues that **relational maintenance** is a difficult task in any context. Still, coworker relationships can have a range of negative outcomes if organizational members have difficulty maintaining their relationships with each other. For this reason, Mithas defines maintenance difficulty as “the degree of difficulty individuals experience in interpersonal relationships due to misunderstandings, incompatibility of goals, and the time and effort necessary to cope with disagreements.”³⁷ Imagine you have two coworkers who tend to behave in an inappropriate fashion nonverbally. Maybe he sits there and rolls his eyes at everything his coworker says, or perhaps she uses exaggerated facial expressions to mock her coworker when he’s talking. Having these types of coworkers will cause us (as a third party witnessing these problems) to spend more time trying to maintain relationships with both of them. On the other hand, the relationship between our two coworkers will require even more effort to reach a point where they can be collegial in the same room. The more time we spend trying to decrease tension or resolve interpersonal conflicts in the workplace, the less time we will ultimately have for our actual jobs. Eventually, this can leave you feeling exhausted feeling and emotionally drained as though you don’t have anything else to give. When this happens, we call this having inadequate resources to meet work demands. We will all eventually reach a point where our psychological and emotional resources are exhausted. When we do hit that wall, our ability to perform job tasks will decrease. As such, we must strive to maintain healthy relationships with our coworkers ourselves, while fostering an environment that encourages our coworkers to maintain healthy relationships with one another. However, it’s essential to note that some individuals will

struggle to play well in the sandbox with others. Some coworker relationships can become so toxic that minimizing contact and interaction can be the best solution to avoid draining your psychological and emotional resources.

Ability to Focus

Have you ever found your mind wandering while you are trying to work? One of the most important aspects of getting our work done is having the ability to focus. Within an organizational context, Methot defines “ability to focus” as “the ability to pay attention to value-producing activities without being concerned with extraneous issues such as off-task thoughts or distractions.”³⁸ When individuals have healthy relationships with their coworkers, they are more easily able to focus their attention on the work at hand. Suppose your coworkers always play politics, stabbing each other in the back, gossiping, and engaging in numerous other counterproductive workplace (or deviant workplace) behaviors. In that case, it’s going to be a lot harder for you to focus on your job.

Types of Coworker Relationships

Now that we’ve looked at some characteristics of coworker relationships, let’s talk about the three different types of coworkers research has categorized. Kathy Kram and Lynn Isabella³⁹ found that there are essentially three different types of coworker relationships in the workplace: information peer, collegial peer, and special peer. Figure 13.5 illustrates the basic things we get from each of these different peer relationships.



Figure 13.5 Types of Coworker Relationships

Information Peers

Information peers are so-called because we rely on these individuals for information about job tasks and the organization itself. As you can see from Figure 13.5, there are four basic types of activities we engage in with peers for information sharing, workplace socialization/onboarding, networking, and knowledge management/maintenance.

Information Sharing

First, we share information with our information peers. Of course, this information is task-focused, designed to help us complete our job more effectively.

Workplace Socialization and Onboarding

Second, information peers are vital during workplace socialization or onboarding. Workplace socialization can be defined as the process by which new organizational members learn the rules (e.g., explicit policies, explicit procedures, etc.), norms (e.g., when you go on break, how to act at work, who to eat with, who not to eat with, etc.), and culture (e.g., innovation, risk-taking, team orientation, competitiveness, etc.) of an organization. Organizations often have a very formal process for workplace socialization that is called onboarding. Onboarding is the process by which an organization helps new members become acquainted with the organization, its members, customers, and products/services.

Networking

Third, information peers help us network within our organization or a larger field. Being successful in any organization involves getting to know the key players within the organization. Our information peers will already have existing relationships with these key players, so they can help make introductions. Furthermore, some of our peers may connect with others in the field (outside the organization), so they could help you meet other professionals as well.

Knowledge Management/Maintenance

Lastly, information peers help us manage and maintain knowledge. During the early stages of workplace socialization, our information peers will help us sift through all the noise and focus on the knowledge that is essential for us to perform our jobs. As we become more involved in an organization, we can still utilize information from peers to help us acquire new knowledge or update existing knowledge. When we discuss knowledge, we refer to two distinct types: explicit and tacit. Explicit knowledge is information that is kept in some retrievable format. For example, you'll need to find previously written reports or a list of customers' names and addresses. These are examples of the types of information that physically (or electronically) may exist within the organization. Tacit knowledge, on the other hand, is the type of knowledge that's difficult to capture permanently (e.g., write down, visualize, or transfer permanently from one person to another) because it's garnered from personal experiences and contexts. Informational peers who have been in an organization for a long time will have a lot of tacit knowledge. They may have an unwritten history of why policies and procedures are the way they are now, or they may know how to "read" certain clients because

they've spent decades building relationships. For obvious reasons, it's much easier to pass on explicit knowledge than implicit knowledge.

Collegial Peers

The second class of relationships we'll have in the workplace are **collegial peers** or relationships that have moderate levels of trust and self-disclosure, and is different from information peers because of the more openness that is shared between two individuals. Collegial peers may not be your best friends, but they are people you enjoy working with. Some hallmarks of collegial peers include career strategizing, job-related feedback, recognizing competence/performance, and friendship.

Career Strategizing

First, collegial peers help us with career strategizing. **Career strategizing** is the process of creating a plan of action for one's career path and trajectory. First, notice that career strategizing is a process, marked by gradual changes that help you achieve your ultimate result. Career strategizing isn't something that happens once and stays the same for the rest of our lives. Often, our intended career paths take twists and turns we never expected nor predicted. However, our collegial peers are often great resources for helping us think through this process, either within a specific organization or a larger field.

Job-Related Feedback

Second, collegial peers also provide us with job-related feedback. We often turn to those who are around us the most often to see how we are doing within an organization. Our collegial peers can provide us with the necessary feedback to ensure we are performing our jobs to the utmost of our abilities and meeting the organization's expectations. Under this category, the focus is purely on how we are performing our jobs and how we can improve our job performance.

Recognizing Competence/Performance

Third, collegial peers are usually the first to recognize our competence in the workplace and recognize us for excellent performance. Our peers have more interactions with us on a day-to-day basis than do middle or upper management, so they are often in the best position to recognize our competence in the workplace. Our competence in the workplace can involve having valued attitudes (e.g., liking hard work, having a positive attitude, working in a team, etc.), cognitive abilities (e.g., information about a field, technical knowledge, industry-specific knowledge, etc.), and skills (e.g., writing, speaking, computer, etc.) necessary to complete critical work-related tasks. Not only do our peers recognize our attitudes, cognitive abilities, and skills, but they are also there to encourage us and tell us we've done a great job when a task is complete.

Friendship

Last, collegial peers provide us a type of friendship in the workplace. They offer us a sense of camaraderie in the workplace. They also offer us someone we can both like and trust in the workplace. Now, it's important to distinguish this level of friendships from other types of friendships we have in our lives. Collegial peers will not be your "best friends," but they will offer you friendships within the workplace that make work more bearable and enjoyable. At the collegial level, you may not associate with these friends outside of work beyond workplace functions (e.g., sitting next to each other at meetings, having lunch together, finding projects to work on together, etc.). It's also possible that a group of collegial peers will attend events outside the workplace together (e.g., going to happy hour, hosting a holiday party, or attending a baseball game).

Special Peers

The final group of peers we work with is called special peers. Kram and Isabella note that special peer relationships "involves revealing central ambivalences and personal dilemmas in work and family realms. Pretense and formal roles are replaced by greater self-disclosure and self-expression."⁴⁰ **Special peer** relationships are marked by confirmation, emotional support, personal feedback, and friendship.

Confirmation

First, special peers provide us with confirmation. When we're having one of our darkest days at work and aren't sure we're doing our jobs well, our special peers are there to let us know that we're doing a good job. They approve of who we are and what we do. These are also the first people we go to when we do something well at work.

Emotional Support

Second, special peers provide us with emotional support in the workplace. Emotional support from special peers comes from their willingness to listen and offer helpful advice and encouragement. Kelly Zellars and Pamela Perrewé have noted there are four types of emotional, social support we get from peers: positive, negative, non-job-related, and empathic communication.⁴¹ Positive emotional support is when you and a special peer talk about the positive sides of work. For example, you and a special peer could talk about the joys of working on a specific project. Negative emotional support, on the other hand, is when you and a special peer talk about the downsides of work. For example, perhaps both of you discuss the challenges of working with a specific manager or coworker. The third form of emotional social support is non-job-related or talking about things that are happening in your personal lives outside of the workplace itself. These could include conversations about friends, family members, hobbies, and so on. A significant portion of the emotional social support we receive from special peers has nothing to do with the workplace at all. The last type of emotional social support is empathic communication or conversations about one's emotions or emotional state in the workplace. If you're having a bad day, you can go to your special peer, and they will reassure you about the feelings you are experiencing. Another example is talking to your special peer after having a bad interaction with a customer that ended with the customer yelling at

you for no reason. After the interaction, you seek your special peer, and they will confirm your feelings and thoughts about the interaction.

Personal Feedback

Third, special peers will provide both reliable and candid feedback about you and your work performance. One of the nice things about building an intimate special peer relationship is that both of you will be honest with one another. There are times we need confirmation, but then there are times we need someone to be bluntly honest with us. We are more likely to feel criticized and hurt when blunt honesty comes from someone we do not have a special peer relationship with. Special peer relationships provide a safe space where we can openly listen to feedback, even if we're not thrilled to receive that feedback.

Friendship

Last, special peers also offer us a sense of deeper friendship in the workplace. You can almost think of special peers as your best friend(s) within the workplace. Most people will only have one or maybe two people they consider a special peer in the workplace. You may be friendly with many of your peers (i.e., collegial peers), but having a special peer relationship is deeper and more meaningful.

A Further Look at Workplace Friendships

At some point, a peer coworker relationship may, or may not, evolve into a workplace friendship. According to Patricia Sias, there are two key hallmarks of a workplace friendship: voluntariness and personalistic focus. First, workplace friendships are voluntary. Someone can assign you a mentor or a mentee, but that person cannot make you form a friendship with that person. Most of the people you work with will not be your friends. You can have amazing working relationships with your coworkers, but you may only develop a handful of workplace friendships. Second, workplace friendships have a personalistic focus. Instead of just viewing this individual as a coworker, we see this person as a whole individual who is a friend. According to research, workplace friendships are marked by higher levels of intimacy, frankness, and depth than those who are peer coworkers.⁴²

Friendship Development in the Workplace

According to Patricia Sias and Daniel Cahill, workplace friendships are developed by a series of influencing factors: individual/personal factors, contextual factors, and communication changes.⁴³ First, some friendships develop because we are drawn to the other person. Maybe you're drawn to a person in a meeting because she has a sense of humor that is similar to yours, or maybe you find that another coworker's attitude toward the organization is exactly like yours. Whatever the reason, we are often drawn to people who are like us. For this reason, we are often drawn to people who resemble ourselves demographically (e.g., age, sex, race, religion, etc.).

A second reason we develop relationships in the workplace is due to a variety of different contextual factors. Maybe your office is right next to someone else's office, so you develop a friendship

because you're next to each other all the time. Perhaps you develop friendships because you're on the same committee or put on the same work project with another person. In large organizations, we often end up making friends with people simply because we have the opportunity to meet them. Depending on the size of your organization, you may end up meeting and interacting with only a tiny percentage of people, so you're unlikely to become friends with everyone in the organization equally. Other organizations provide a culture where friendships are approved of and valued. In the realm of workplace friendship research, two important factors have been noticed concerning contextual factors controlled by the organization: opportunity and prevalence.⁴⁴ Friendship opportunity refers to the degree to which an organization promotes and enables workers to develop friendships within the organization. Does your organization have regular social gatherings for employees? Does your organization encourage informal interaction among employees, or does it discourage coworker communication? Not surprisingly, individuals who work in organizations that foster and support friendships tend to be more satisfied, motivated, and more committed to the organization itself.

Friendship prevalence, on the other hand, is less of an organizational culture and more the degree to which an individual feels that they have developed or can develop workplace friendships. You may have an organization that attempts to create an environment where people can make friends, but if you don't think you can trust your coworkers, you're not very likely to make workplace friends. Although the opportunity is important when seeing how an individual responds to the organization, friendship prevalence is probably the more important factor of the two. If I'm a highly communicative apprehensive employee, I may not end up making any friends at work, so I may see my workplace place as just a job without any commitment at all. When an individual isn't committed to the workplace, they will probably start looking for another job.⁴⁵

Last, as friendships develop, our communication patterns within those relationships change. For example, when we transition from being just an acquaintance to a friend with a coworker, we are more likely to increase the frequency of communication about non-work and personal topics. When we transition from friend to close friend, Sias and Cahill note that this change is marked by a decrease in caution and an increase in intimacy. An increase in discussing work-related problems characterizes this transition in friendship. The final transition from a close friend to "almost best" friend. According to Sias and Cahill, "Because of the increasing amount of trust developed between the coworkers, they felt freer to share opinions and feelings, particularly their feelings about work frustrations. Their discussion about both work and personal issues became increasingly more detailed and intimate."⁴⁶

Relationship Disengagement

Thus far, we've talked about workplace friendships as positive factors in the workplace, but any friendship can sour. Some friendships sour because one person moves into a position of authority of the other, so there is no longer perceived equality within the relationship. Other friendships occur when there is a relationship violation of some kind (see [Chapter 8](#)). Some friendships devolve because of conflicting expectations of the relationship. Perhaps one friend believes that giving him a heads up about insider information in the workplace is part of being a friend, while the other person sees it as a violation of the trust her supervisors have given her. When we hold conflicting ideas about

what it means to “be a friend,” a schism often emerges. So, how does an individual get out of workplace friendships? Patricia Sias and Tarra Perry were the first researchers to discuss how colleagues disengage from relationships with their coworkers.⁴⁷ Sias and Perry found three distinct tools that coworkers use: state-of-the-relationship talk, cost escalation, and depersonalization. Before explaining them, we should note that people use all three and do not necessarily progress through them in any particular order.

State-of-the-Relationship Talk

The first strategy people use when disengaging from workplace friendships involves state-of-the-relationship talk. **State-of-the-relationship talk** is exactly what it sounds like; you officially have a discussion that the friendship is ending. The goal of state-of-the-relationship talk is to engage the other person and inform them that ending the friendship is the best way to ensure that the two can continue a professional, functional relationship. Ideally, all workplace friendships could end in a situation where both parties agree that it’s in everyone’s best interest for the friendship to stop. Still, we all know this isn’t always the case, which is why the other two are often necessary.

Cost Escalation

The second strategy people use when ending a workplace friendship involves cost escalation. **Cost escalation** involves tactics that make the cost of maintaining the relationship higher than getting out of the relationship. For example, a coworker could start belittling a friend in public, making the friend the center of all jokes, or talking about the friend behind the friend’s back. All of these behaviors make the cost of the relationship too high for the other person.

Depersonalization

The final strategy involves depersonalization. **Depersonalization** can come in one of two basic forms. First, an individual can depersonalize a relationship by stopping all the interaction that is not task-focused. When you have to interact with the workplace friend, you keep the conversation purely business and do not allow for talk related to personal lives. The goal of this type of behavior is to alter the relationship from one of closeness to one of professional distance. The second way people can depersonalize a relationship is to avoid that person. If you know a workplace friend is going to be at a staff party, you purposefully don’t go. If you see the workplace friend coming down the hallway, you go in the opposite direction or duck inside a room before they can see you. Again, the purpose of this type of depersonalization is to put actual distance between you and the other person. According to Sias and Perry’s research, depersonalization is the most commonly used tactic.⁴⁸

Key Takeaways

- Patricia Sias highlights four reasons for coworker relationships—mentoring, information, power, and support—while Jessica Methot adds trust, relational maintenance,

and the ability to focus as additional characteristics.

- Kathy Kram and Lynn Isabella explained that there are three different workplace relationships: information peer, collegial peer, and special peer.
 - Information: Peers who exchange job-related knowledge.
 - Collegial: Peers who share moderate trust and feedback.
 - Special: Peers who offer deep emotional support and workplace friendship.
- Patricia Sias and Daniel Cahill's created a list of influencing factors on coworker relationships. First, we are drawn to some coworkers more than others. As such, traditional notions of interpersonal attraction and homophily are at play. A second influencing factor involves contextual changes. Often, there are specific contextual changes (e.g., moving offices, friendship opportunity, and friendship prevalence) impact the degree to which people develop coworker friendships. Finally, communication changes as we progress through the four types of coworker friendships: acquaintance, friend, close friend, and almost best friend.
- As workplace friendships develop, coworkers share more personal information, express less caution, and increase both work-related and emotional disclosures.
- Patricia Sias and Tarra Perry describe three different ways that coworkers can disengage from coworker relationships in the workplace:
 - Holding a state-of-the-relationship talk.
 - Increasing the cost of maintaining the friendship.
 - Creating professional distance through depersonalization.

Exercises

1. Reflect on your relationships with coworkers at work. Which of Patricia Sias' four reasons and Jessica Methot's three additional characteristics were at play in these coworker relationships?
2. Kathy Kram and Lynn Isabella described three different peers we have in the workplace: information peer, collegial peer, and special peer. Think about your workplace. Can you identify the people who fall into all three categories? If not, why do you think you don't have all three types of peers? If you do, how are these relationships distinctly different from one another?
3. Think about an experience where you needed to end a workplace relationship with a coworker. Which of Patricia Sias and Tarra Perry's disengagement strategies did you use? Do you think there are other disengagement strategies available beyond the

ones described by Sias and Perry?

Romantic Relationships at Work

Learning Objectives

1. Define the term “romantic workplace relationship.”
2. Reconstruct the model of romantic relationships in the workplace.
3. Describe the four reasons romantic workplace relationships develop.
4. Summarize the findings related to how coworkers view romantic workplace relationships.

In a 2014 poll conducted by CareerBuilder.com and Harris Interactive Polling, they found that 38% of U.S. workers had dated a coworker at least once, and 20% of office romances involved someone who is already married.⁴⁹ According to the press release issued by the researchers, “Office romances most often start with coworkers running into each other outside of work (12 percent) or at a happy hour (11 percent). Some other situations that led to romance include late nights at work (10 percent), having lunch together (10 percent), and love at first sight (9 percent).” Furthermore, according to data collected by Stanford University’s “How Couples Meet and Stay Together” research project, around 12% of married couples meet at work.⁵⁰ Meeting through friends is the number one way that people meet their marriage partners, but those who met at work were more likely to get married than those who met through friends.

Workplaces are still a place for romance, but this romance can often be a double-edged sword for organizations. In the modern organization, today’s office fling can easily turn into tomorrow’s sexual harassment lawsuit.

Romance in the Workplace Gone Wrong

MSN covered Coldplay’s “kisscam” catching Astronomer’s CEO and VP of HR affair “Affair With Colleague Accidentally Exposed By Coldplay⁵¹”. Andy Byron, the CEO of the software development firm Astronomer, and Kristin Cabot, the company’s Chief People Officer, were shown wrapped in each other’s arms during a Coldplay concert. They quickly ducked down when realizing they were on camera. Their immense personal embarrassment led to job

loss and relationship loss not to mention the fall out for their families. Will they ever recuperate from their workplace romance?

Understanding Romantic Workplace Relationships

According to Charles Pierce, Donn Byrne, and Herman Aguinis, a **romantic workplace relationship** occurs when “two employees have acknowledged their mutual attraction to one another and have physically acted upon their romantic feelings in the form of a dating or otherwise intimate association.”⁵² From this perspective, the authors noted five distinct characteristics commonly associated with workplace romantic relationships:

1. Passionate desire to be with one’s romantic partner;
2. Shared, intimate self-disclosures;
3. Affection and mutual respect;
4. Emotional fulfillment; and
5. Sexual fulfillment/gratification.

A Model of Romantic Workplace Relationships

In their article examining romantic relationships in the workplace, Pierce, Byrne, and Aguinis proposed a model for understanding these relationships. Figure 13.6 is a simplified version of that basic model. The basic model is

pretty easy to follow. First, it starts with propinquity, or the physical closeness of two people in a given space. One of the main reasons romantic relationships develop in the workplace is because we are around people in our offices every day. It’s this physical proximity that ultimately leads people to develop interpersonal attractions. However, just because we find someone interpersonally attractive doesn’t mean we’re going to jump in a romantic relationship with them. Most people (if not all people) that we find interpersonally attractive at work will never develop romantic attractions toward us. However, romantic attraction does happen. At the same time, if you don’t desire a workplace relationship, then even a romantic attraction won’t lead you to start engaging in a workplace relationship. If, however, you decide or desire to workplace relationship, then you are likely to participate in that romantic workplace relationship.



Figure 13.6 Romantic Workplace Relationship Model

Once you start engaging in a romantic workplace relationship, there will be consequences of that relationship. Now, some of these consequences are positive, and others could be negative. For our purposes, we categorize these consequences into three main categories: personal, professional, and organizational.

Personal Outcomes

The first type of outcomes someone may face are personal outcomes or outcomes that affect an individual and not their romantic partner. Ultimately, romantic relationships can have a combination of both positive and negative outcomes for the individuals involved. For our purposes here, we will assume that both romantic partners are single and not in any other kind of romantic relationship. As long as a romantic relationship is functioning positively, individuals will be happier, which can have a positive impact on someone's job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and employee motivation. Employees engaged in romantic workplace relationships often work longer hours to spend time with their romantic partners.

Romantic relationships often have their ups and downs. If a relationship is not going well, individuals in romantic workplace relationships can lead to adverse outcomes. In this case, we could see a decrease in job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and employee motivation. You could also see romantic partners trying to put more distance between themselves and their romantic partner at work. In these cases, you may see people avoid being assigned to the same project or working longer hours to avoid extra time with their romantic partner.

Overall, it's essential to remember that romantic workplace relationships can have significant personal consequences in the workplace environment. People often think they can keep their romantic and professional selves separate, but these distinctions can become blurry and harder to distinguish.

Professional Outcomes

The second outcome someone in a romantic workplace relationship may face is professional. According to Robert Quinn, a range of professional outcomes can occur when someone is involved in a romantic relationship.⁵³ Quinn listed six basic outcomes someone people achieve professionally because of engaging in a romantic workplace relationship: advancement, job security, increased power, financial rewards, easier work, job efficiency. Each of these professional outcomes are not guaranteed, and depend on the nature of the romantic relationship and who the partner is. If someone's partner has more power within the organization, then they can show more favoritism toward their romantic power. Whereas, individuals on the same rung of the hierarchy, may not can create professional advancement.

There is also the flipside to professional outcomes. If a relationship sours, someone could see their career advancement slowed, less job security, less power in the workplace, etc. It's in cases where romantic relationships sour (especially between individuals at different rungs of an organization's hierarchy) when we see the real problems associated with romantic workplace relationships.

Organizational Outcomes

The final type of outcome happens not directly to the individuals within a romantic workplace relationship, but rather to the organization itself. Organizations face a wide range of outcomes that stem from romantic workplace relationships. When romantic workplace relationships are going well, organizations have members who are more satisfied, motivated, and committed to their work. Of course, this all trickles over into higher levels of productivity.

On the other hand, there are also negative outcomes that stem from romantic relationships in the workplace. First, people in intimate relationships with each other in the workplace are often the subjects of extensive office gossip.⁵⁴ And this gossiping is time-consuming and can become a problem from a wide range of organizational members. Second, individuals who are “dating their boss” can lead to resentment among their peers if their peers perceive the boss as providing preferential treatment to their significant other in the workplace. Furthermore, not all romantic relationships in the workplace will turn out well. Many romantic workplace relationships simply will dissolve. Sometimes, this dissolution of the relationship is amicable, and both parties are okay with the breakup, allowing them to maintain professionalism afterward. Unfortunately, romantic workplace relationships occasionally dissolve, and things can become messy and unprofessional in the workplace. Although happy romantic workplace relationships have many positive side effects, negative romantic workplace relationships can have the opposite outcomes for an organization, leading to decreased job satisfaction, employee motivation, and organizational commitment, which in turn result in lower productivity.

Many dissolutions of romantic workplace relationships can lead to formerly happy and productive organizational members seeking new jobs away from the person they were dating. In other cases (especially those involving people on different rungs of the organizational hierarchy), the organization could face legal claims of sexual harassment. Many organizations recognize that this last outcome is a real possibility, so they require any couple engaged in a romantic relationship at work to enter into a consensual relationship agreement, also known as a “love contract” (see Sidebar for an example of a love contract). Other organizations ban romantic workplace relationships completely, and people found violating the policy can be terminated.

Consensual Romance in the Workplace Agreement (Love Contract)⁵⁵

A consensual romance agreement to be signed by two romantically-involved employees representing that their relationship is entirely consensual and acknowledging the employer’s anti-harassment policies and rules. This Standard Document is drafted in favor of the employer. It is based on federal law. This Standard Document has integrated notes with important explanations and drafting tips. For information on state law requirements for discrimination and harassment, see Anti-Discrimination Laws: State Q&A Tool.

Consensual Romance in the Workplace Agreement (Love Contract)

DRAFTING NOTE: READ THIS BEFORE USING DOCUMENT

Employers allowing employees to engage in romantic relationships with one another can ask romantically involved employees to sign an agreement stating that their romantic relationship is entirely consensual and free from coercion, intimidation, and harassment. These agreements are often referred to as love contracts.

Employers should consider using this love contract to minimize legal risk associated with employee romantic relationships, particularly potential sexual harassment claims. For more information about the risks associated with employee romantic relationships, see Practice Notes, Romance in the Workplace (0-502-6127)¹ and Harassment (9-502-7844).

USE OF A LOVE CONTRACT

Before employers request romantically involved employees to sign this agreement, they should interview each employee separately. They should record the conversation in written notes and ask questions designed to confirm that the relationship is entirely consensual. The employer should then explain each portion of the agreement to each employee separately and review the policies it references with them. Finally, the employer should ask each employee to review the agreement and to sign it if they agree with its terms.

MINIMIZING RISK

To further minimize risk, all employers should consider:

- Implementing and uniformly enforcing an anti-harassment policy (for a sample policy, see Standard Document, Anti-Harassment Policy (7-501-6926)).
- Implementing and uniformly enforcing a romance in the workplace policy (for a sample policy, see Standard Document, Romance in the Workplace Policy (8-502-7646)).
- Conducting training on sexual harassment prevention (for more information, see Sexual Harassment Prevention Training Checklist (9-502-7349)).

BRACKETED TEXT

Counsel should replace bracketed text in ALL CAPS with information specific to the particular circumstances. Bracketed text in sentence case is optional or alternative language that counsel should include, modify, or delete, as appropriate. A forward slash in bracketed text indicates that counsel should choose from among two or more alternative words or phrases.

1. This number refers to other legal templates available from legalsolutions.com/practical-law.

1. Equal Employment Opportunity Workplace. The undersigned recognize and agree that it is [EMPLOYER NAME]'s policy to provide an equal opportunity in hiring, employment, promotion, compensation, and all other employment-related decisions without regard to race, color, religion, creed, national origin or ancestry, sex, age (40 or older), being a qualified per-

son with a physical or mental disability, veteran status, genetic information, or any other basis set forth in the applicable federal, state, and local laws or regulations relating to discrimination in employment. The undersigned understand that [EMPLOYER NAME] does not tolerate unwelcome or offensive conduct or conduct that creates a hostile work environment that is in any way based on or related to a person having any of the characteristics described above.

The undersigned agree that they have received, read, and understand [EMPLOYER NAME]'s [NAME OF EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY POLICY] and agree to adhere to all of its terms.

DRAFTING NOTE: EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY WORKPLACE

Employers should consistently take advantage of opportunities to remind employees that they are an equal employment opportunity employer and that they do not discriminate based on any protected characteristic, whether under federal, state, or local law.

Employers should ensure employees acknowledge this fact in this type of agreement in case one or both later brings a claim for harassment or discrimination related to a failed relationship. For more information about the legal risks of a failed employee romantic relationship, see Practice Note, Romance in the Workplace (0-502-6127). For a sample equal employment opportunity policy, see Standard Document, Equal Employment Opportunity Policy (6-500-4349).

2. All Forms of Sexual Harassment Prohibited. The undersigned also recognize and agree that [EMPLOYER NAME] does not tolerate sexual harassment, a form of unlawful discrimination. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when:

- submission to such conduct is made, explicitly or implicitly, a condition of an individual's employment or advancement;
- submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting the individual; or
- such unreasonable conduct interferes with an individual's work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.

The undersigned agree that they have received, read, and understand [EMPLOYER NAME]'s [NAME OF ANTI-HARASSMENT POLICY] and agree to adhere to all of its terms.

DRAFTING NOTE: ALL FORMS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT PROHIBITED

Sexual harassment is the most likely discriminatory practice an employee may claim if an employee romance goes awry. Accordingly, it is especially important to remind and request employees to acknowledge in writing that sexual harassment of any kind is absolutely prohibited and not tolerated (for more information on the different types of sexual harassment, quid pro quo and hostile work environment harassment, see Practice Note, Harassment (9-502-7844)).

It is also helpful to remind employees about the employer's anti-harassment policy, which should contain mandatory procedures for reporting harassment if it occurs, and request that they acknowledge the policy in writing. Having this policy and applying it uniformly assists employers in making a defense in certain sexual harassment cases called the Faragher-Ellerth defense. For more information about the importance of anti-harassment policies and the Faragher-Ellerth defense, see Practice Note, Harassment: Liability for HWE Harassment Subject to Faragher-Ellerth Defense (9-502-7844). For a sample anti-harassment policy, see Standard Document, Anti-Harassment Policy (7-501-6926).

3. Consensual Relationship. We, the undersigned employees, have entered into a personal relationship with each other. We agree as follows:

- Our relationship is entirely voluntary and consensual.
- Our relationship will not have a negative impact on our work.
- We will not engage in any public displays of affection or other behavior that might create a hostile work environment for others or that might make others uncomfortable.
- [We understand that one or both of us may need to transfer to another [department/ group/ location] to remove any conflicts of interest in our working environment. If a transfer will not remove the conflict of interest, we understand that one of us may have to resign or be demoted to remove the conflict of interest. We further understand that [EMPLOYER NAME] will first ask us to choose which of us will be subject to a transfer, demotion, or resignation. If we fail to choose, [EMPLOYER NAME] will be forced to choose for us. We understand that [EMPLOYER NAME] will make such a decision without regard to any protected class characteristic and in compliance with [EMPLOYER NAME]'s [NAME OF EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY POLICY] and [NAME OF ROMANCE IN THE WORKPLACE POLICY].]
- We will act professionally toward each other at all times, even after the relationship has ended.
- We will not participate in any company decision-making processes that could affect each other's pay, promotional opportunities, performance reviews, hours, shifts, or career, while in this relationship [and after the relationship ends].
- We agree that, if the relationship ends, we will inform [EMPLOYER NAME] if we

believe it is necessary to protect our rights or if the [NAME OF ANTI-HARASSMENT POLICY] is violated.

- We each agree that, if the relationship ends, we will respect the other person's decision to end the relationship and will not retaliate against the other person, engage in any unprofessional or inappropriate efforts to resume the relationship, or engage in any other conduct toward the other person that could violate the [NAME OF ANTI-HARASSMENT POLICY].

DRAFTING NOTE: CONSENSUAL RELATIONSHIP

This section, the most important of the agreement, allows employees to show that the parties represented to the employer that their relationship was free from harassment, coercion, or intimidation. This representation minimizes risk to the employer that one of the employees will later claim they were sexually harassed or pressured into the relationship. It also demonstrates to courts that the employees were on notice about their expected conduct should problems later arise.

ACKNOWLEDGING POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The employees also acknowledge in this section that their relationship could create a conflict of interest and agree to cooperate with certain procedures necessary to remove the conflict of interest, including an optional clause subjecting one or both of them to transfer, or in a worst-case scenario, demotion or termination.

Possible Conflicts in Reporting Structure

It is strongly recommended that employers do not permit romantically involved employees to remain in the same reporting structure. This may include circumstances where one employee supervises the other or any other structure where one of the employees is able to affect the terms and conditions of the other's employment. A lateral transfer of one of the employees to another department, group, or location is the easiest way to remove the conflict, but where a transfer is not possible or feasible, it may be necessary to consider a demotion or termination of one of the romantic partners. In all cases, the employer should ask the romantically involved employees to determine which employee will be affected to minimize risk of discrimination claims.

Decision-Making Authority Over Terms and Conditions of Employment

In this section, the romantically involved employees also agree that they will not participate in any decision-making processes that could affect each other's terms and conditions of employment. This clause contains an optional phrase allowing the employer to choose whether it should apply only for the duration of the relationship or afterward as well. Although it may be logistically easier for the employer to limit it to the duration of the relationship, employers should strongly consider leaving the prohibition in place after the relationship ends to minimize risk of discrimina-

tion and retaliation claims (for more information about retaliation, see Practice Note, Retaliation (5-501-1430) and Standard Document, Anti-Retaliation Policy (8-503-5830)).

EMPLOYEE REPRESENTATIONS

The representations by the romantic partners also help ensure that the employees will not:

- Disrupt the workplace by acting unprofessionally.
- Allow the relationship to negatively impact their work.
- Negatively impact the environment of those around them.

Finally, the representations reiterate that the employees:

- Are aware of the employer's anti-harassment policy.
- Will not violate the policy in any way.
- Will follow its procedures for reporting any harassing behavior.

This minimizes risk of a harassment claim and increases the likelihood of being able to use the Faragher-Ellerth defense in litigation if necessary.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the undersigned have executed this Agreement as of the [DAY OF MONTH] day of [MONTH], [YEAR].

Dated this _____ day of _____, _____.

Employees:

(Employee Signature)

(Printed Name)

(Employee Signature)

(Printed Name)

Witness:

(Witness Signature)

(Printed Name)

Created by: Joseph L. Beachboard, Ogletree Deakins, With Practical Law Labor & Employment

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Why Romantic Workplace Relationships Develop

Robert Quinn was the first researcher to investigate why individuals choose to engage in romantic relationships at work.⁵⁶ Renee Cowan and Sean Horan more recently updated the list of motives Quinn created.⁵⁷ Cowan and Horan found that the modern worker engages in romantic workplace relationships for one of four reasons: ease of opportunity, similarity, time, and the hookup. The first three motives are very similar to those found in other interpersonal relationships. These categories were not mutually exclusive. Let's examine these motives in more detail.

Ease of Opportunity

The first reason people engage in romantic workplace relationships; **ease of opportunity** happens because work fosters an environment where people are close to one another. We interact with a broad range of people in the workplace, so finding someone whom one is romantically attracted to is not that surprising. This is similar to the idea of propinquity discussed by Pierce, Byrne, and Aguinis in their romantic workplace relationship development model discussed earlier in this chapter.⁵⁸

Similarity

The second motive discussed by Cowan and Horan is **similarity**, or finding that others in the workplace may have identical personalities, interests, backgrounds, desires, needs, goals, etc. As discussed earlier in this book, we know that when people perceive others as having the same attitude, background, or demographic characteristics (homophily), they are more likely to perceive them as similar to themselves and are more likely to enter relationships with those individuals. The longer we get to know those people, the greater the probability that we may decide to turn this into a special peer relationship or a romantic workplace relationship.

Time

At the very beginning of this chapter, we spend a lot of our lives at work. In a typical year, we spend around 92.71 days at work (50-weeks a year * 5 days a week * 8.9 hours per day). You ultimately spend more **time** with your coworkers than you do with almost any other group of people outside your immediate family. When you spend this much time with people, we learn about them and develop a sense of who they are and what they're like. We also know that time is a strong factor when predicting sexual attraction.⁵⁹

The Hook Up

Speaking of sexual attraction, the final motive people have for engaging in romantic workplace relationships was called “the hook up” by Cowan and Horan. The purpose of “**the hook up**” is casual sex without any romantic entanglements. Unlike the other three motives, this one is less about creating a romantic workplace relationship, and more about achieving mutual sexual satisfaction with one’s coworker. In Cowan and Horan’s study, they noted, “What we found interesting about this theme was that it was only attributed to coworker’s WRs. Although several participants described WRs they had engaged in, this motive was never attributed to those pursuit.”⁶⁰

How Coworkers View Romantic Workplace Relationships

The final part of this section will examine the research related to how coworkers view romantic workplace relationships. The overwhelming majority of us will never engage in a romantic relationship at work, but most (if not all) of us will likely watch others who do. Sometimes, these relationships work out, but often they don’t. Some researchers have examined how coworkers perceive their peers who are involved in romantic relationships at work.

- Coworkers trust peers less when they were involved in a romantic workplace relationship with a supervisor than with a different organizational member.⁶¹
- Coworkers reported making less honest and accurate self-disclosures to peers when they were involved in a romantic workplace relationship with a supervisor than when they were involved with a different organizational member.⁶²
- “[C]oworkers perceived a peer dating a superior to be more driven by job motives and less by love motives than they perceived peer dating individuals of any other status type.”⁶³
- Coworkers reported that they felt their peers were more likely to get an unfair advantage when dating one’s leader rather a coworker at a different level of the hierarchy.⁶⁴
- Peers dating subordinates were also felt to get an unfair advantage over peers dating people outside the organization.⁶⁵
- Gay or lesbian peers who dated a leader were trusted less, deceived more, and perceived as less credible than a peer who dated a peer.⁶⁶
- “[O]rganizational peers are less likely to deceive gay and lesbian peers involved in WRs and to perceive gay and lesbian peers in WRs as more caring and of higher character than heterosexual peers who date at work.”⁶⁷
- Women who saw higher levels of sexual behavior in the workplace have lower levels of job satisfaction. Still, there was no relationship between observing sexual behaviors at work and job satisfaction for men.⁶⁸
- When taking someone’s level of job satisfaction out of the picture, people who saw higher levels of sexual behavior in the workplace were more likely to look for another job.⁶⁹

As you can see, dating in the workplace and open displays of sexuality in the workplace have some interesting outcomes for both the individuals involved in the relationship, their peers, and the organization.

Key Takeaways

- According to Charles Pierce and colleagues, a romantic workplace relationship occurs when “two employees have acknowledged their mutual attraction to one another and have physically acted upon their romantic feelings as a dating or otherwise intimate association.”
- Charles Pierce, Donn Byrne, and Herman Aguinis’ model of romantic workplace relationships (Seen in Figure 13.6) has six basic stages: propinquity, interpersonal attraction, romantic attraction, desire for romantic relationship, engage in workplace relationship, and outcomes of workplace relationship (personal, professional, and organizational).
- Renee Cowan and Sean Horan found four basic reasons romantic workplace relationships occur: ease of opportunity, similarity, time, and the hookup. First, relationships develop because we spend a lot of time around people, and we are naturally drawn to some of them. Second, we perceive ourselves as similar to coworkers having identical personalities, interests, backgrounds, desires, needs, goals, etc.... Third, we spend a lot of time at work and the more time we spend with people the closer relationships become and can turn into romantic ones. Lastly, some people engage in romantic workplace relationships, or casual sex without any romantic entanglements, known as the hook-up.
- As a whole, the research on coworkers and their perceptions of romantic workplace relationships are more in favor of individuals (both gay/lesbian and straight) who engage in relationships with coworkers at the same level. Coworkers do not perceive their peers positively when they are dating someone at a more senior level (especially one’s direct supervisor). Observing coworkers engaging in sexual behavior leads to decreases in job satisfaction, which can lead to an increase in one’s desire to find another job.

Exercises

1. Where do you think the difference lies between romantic workplace relationships and sexual harassment?

2. When you evaluate the reasons people engage in romantic workplace relationships described by Renee Cowan and Sean Horan, do you think their list is complete? Do you believe there are other reasons people engage in romantic workplace relationships?
3. If you engaged in a romantic workplace relationship, would you be comfortable signing a “love contract” with your human resources department? Does your opinion differ if the target of your romantic affection is a follower, peer, or leader?

Problematic Workplace Relationships

Learning Objectives

1. Define the term *deviant workplace behavior*.
2. Identify the six types of problematic bosses described by Janie Harden Fritz.
3. Describe the eight types of problematic coworkers discussed by Janie Harden Fritz.
4. Assess the five types of problematic subordinates identified by Janie Harden Fritz.

Eventually, everyone will encounter someone in the workplace who will drive them crazy. There are numerous books available designed to help you deal with difficult people, toxic individuals, workplace vampires, jerks, and energy drainers. Some of these people are just irritants, while other problem people can be more egregious (e.g., aggressive, bullying, deviating from work norms, overly cynical about everything, etc.). We view these individuals as problematic because they ultimately require more of our resources to address their needs. There’s a reason some writers refer to problem people as **emotional vampires** because we have to use more of our emotional resources to deal with these people, and they increase our levels of stress along the way.⁷⁰ In this section, we are going to explore the different types of “problem people” we come in contact within the workplace and how we can strive toward workplace civility. In the organizational literature, we often refer to these people as engaging in **deviant workplace behavior**, or voluntary behavior of organizational members that violates significant organizational norms and practices or threatens the well-being of the organization and its members.

Research on problematic individuals in the workplace reveals that these issues are prevalent at all organizational levels. We have problematic bosses, peers, and subordinates. In an attempt to understand the types of problem people individuals face in the workplace, in 2002 Janie Harden Fritz created a typology of the different types of problem people we encounter in the workplace,⁷¹ which was later updated in 2009.⁷² Figure 13.7 shows the typology. In this typology, Harden Fritz discusses

how different positions in the workplace can lead to varying types of problem people. Let's examine each of these individually.

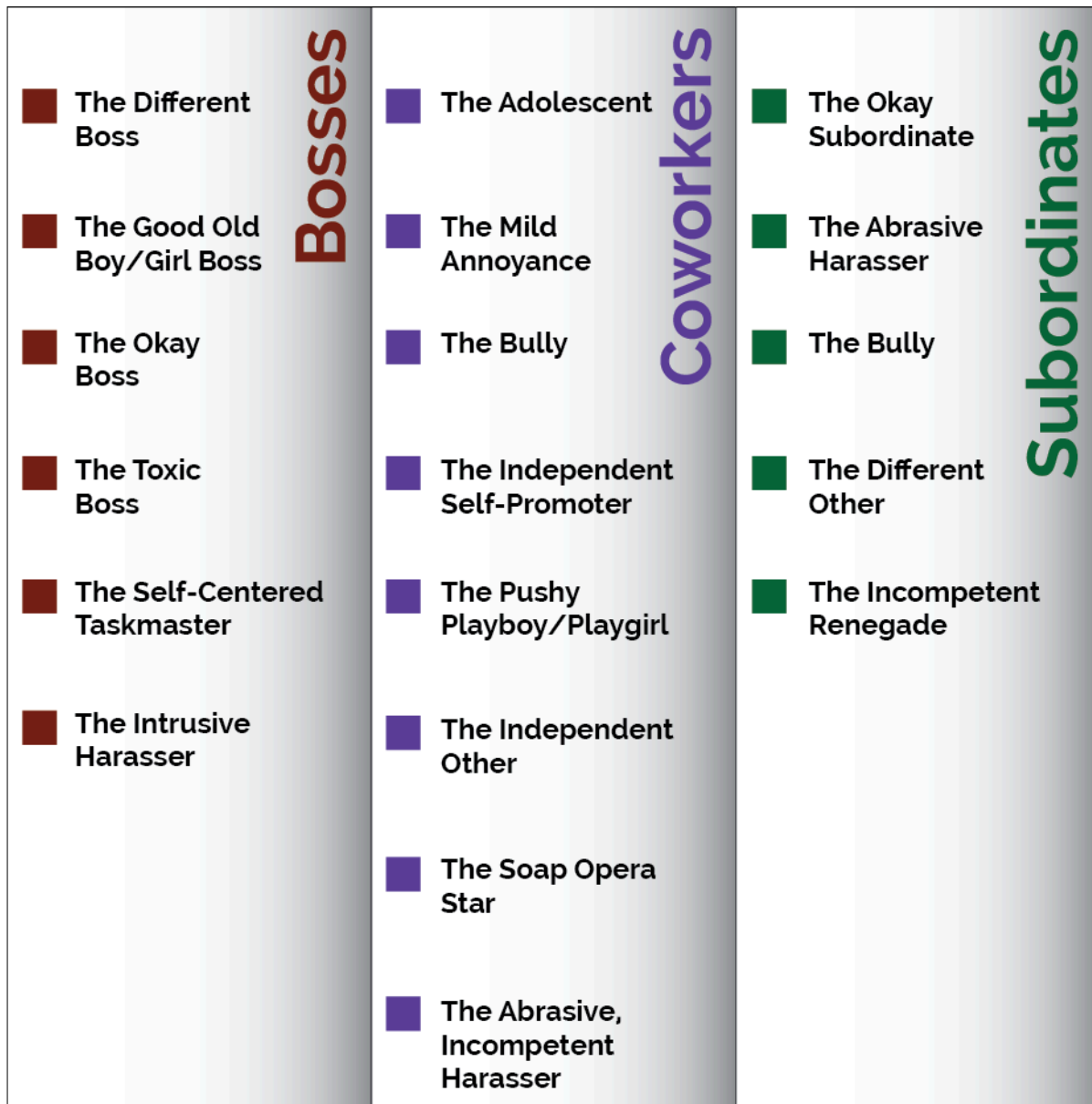


Figure 13.7 Problematic People in the Workplace

Problem Bosses

Through Harden Fritz's research into bosses, she identified six common types of problematic bosses: different, okay, good old boy/girl, toxic, self-centered taskmaster, and intrusive harasser.

The Different Boss

First, The Different Boss is someone a subordinate sees as distractingly different from them as a person. Different subordinates are going to view what is "distractingly different" in a wide range of

different ways. Some people who view their bosses as “distractingly different” may also succumb to their prejudices about people from various social groups.

Good Old Boy or Good Old Girl Boss

Second, is the Good Old Boy or Good Old Girl Boss. This type of boss is someone who has probably not kept pace with the modern world of corporate thinking. This person may be gregarious and outgoing, but this person sees the “old ways of doing things” as best—even when they’re problematic. These individuals see sexual harassment as something that isn’t a big deal in the workplace. Their subordinates are also more likely to view some of their behavior as unethical.

Okay Boss

The third type of boss is the Okay Boss. This person is exactly like the name says, okay and average in just about every way possible. These individuals are, in many ways, coasting toward retirement. They try not to rock the boat within the organization, so they will never stand up to their bosses, nor will they advocate for their subordinates. For someone who enjoys work and wants to succeed in life, working for one of these individuals can be very frustrating because they prefer the average and create an environment where the average is the norm, and those who exceed it are the outcasts.

The Toxic Boss

Fourth, we have the toxic boss. These bosses are just all-around problematic in the workplace. Toxic bosses are often seen as unethical, obnoxious, and unprofessional by their subordinates. These are the types of bosses who can create reasonably hostile work environments and pit employees against each other for their amusement. However, when it comes to harassing behavior, they are less likely to engage in harassment directly. Still, they can often create environments where both sexual harassment and bullying become the norm.

Self-Centered Taskmaster

The fifth type of problematic boss is the self-centered taskmaster. The self-centered taskmaster is ultimately “focused on getting the job done to advance his/her own goals, without concern for others.”⁷³ This type of boss is purely focused on getting work done. This individual may be excessively demanding in the amount of work they assign to subordinates. Ultimately, this individual wants to demonstrate to their superiors how effective they are as a leader to advance up the organizational hierarchy. On the other hand, these individuals are highly competent, but their tendency to exert power over others in an obnoxious manner makes working for this type of boss very stressful.

The Intrusive Harasser Boss

Sixth, we have the intrusive harasser boss. This individual is highly intrusive and often wants to get involved in their subordinates’ personal and professional lives. They are likely to be overly attentive in the workplace, which can interfere with an individual’s ability to complete their task assign-

ments. This boss is likely to be one who engages in activities like sexual harassment, backstabbing, and busybody behavior.

Problem Coworkers

Through Harden Fritz's research into coworkers, she identified eight common types of problematic coworkers: the adolescent, the bully, the mild annoyance, the independent self-promoter, the pushy playboy/playgirl, the independent other, the soap opera star, and the abrasive, incompetent harasser.

Adolescent

The first common problematic coworker you can have is the adolescent. The adolescent is the Peter Pan of the business world; they don't want to grow up. These individuals tend to crave being the center of attention and will be the first to share their accomplishments with everyone. You almost feel like you need to give them a Scooby Snack just for doing their job. However, if someone dares to question them, they become very defensive, probably because they don't want others to know how insecure they feel.

Bully

Second, we have the bully. Bullying is sadly alive and well in corporate America. This individual has a tendency to be overly demanding of their peers, yet they often take credit for their peers' work when the time comes. This is your prototypical schoolyard bully all grown up and in an office job. In 2005, Charlotte Rayner and Loreleigh Keashly examined the available definitions for "workplace bullying" and derived at five specific characteristics:

1. the experience of negative behavior;
2. behaviors experienced persistently;
3. targets experiencing damage;
4. targets labeling themselves as bullied; and
5. targets with less power and difficulty defending themselves.⁷⁴

You'll notice from this list that being a bully isn't a one-off behavior for these coworkers. This behavior targets individuals negatively, occurs over a prolonged period, and can have long-term psychological and physiological consequences for those who are targeted. We should note that bullies rarely act in isolation, but rather operate in packs. For this reason, much European research on this subject has been referred to as mobbing rather than bullying. Sadly, this is an all-too-often occurrence in the modern work world. In a large study examining 148 international corporations through both qualitative and quantitative methods, Randy Hodson, Vincent Roscigno, and Steven Lopez reported that 49 percent of the organizations they investigated had routine patterns of workplace bullying.⁷⁵

Mild Annoyance

The third type of problematic coworker is the mildly annoying one. When it comes down to it, this person will not ruin your day, but they are mildly annoying and will be so on a routine basis. Maybe it's a coworker who wants to come in every morning and talk to you about what they watched on television the night before while you're trying to catch up on email. Or maybe it's the coworker who plays music a little too loudly in the workplace. There are all kinds of things that can annoy us as human beings, so a mildly annoying coworker is generally tolerated.

Independent Self-Promoter

Fourth, we have the independent self-promoter. The independent self-promoter is someone who likes to toot their own horn at work. This individual is slightly to extremely narcissistic and thinks the world revolves around them. These individuals won't take credit for other people's work, but they are not the type to do work that needs to be done unless they see its utility in enhancing their reputation.

Pushy Playboy/Playgirl

The fifth problematic coworker is the pushy playboy/playgirl. The pushy playboy/playgirl is an individual marked by their tendency to push other coworkers into doing things for the pushy playboy/playgirl. Often, these tasks have nothing to do with work at all. For example, the pushy playboy/playgirl would be the type of person to demand that a younger or more submissive coworker run down the street for a Starbucks run. Furthermore, these are the types of people who are overly demanding of coworkers and then misrepresent their performance to those higher in the corporate food chain.

Independent Other

The sixth common problematic coworker is the independent other. The independent other is like the different bosses discussed earlier. These people are perceived as uniquely different from their coworkers. Many characteristics can make someone viewed as uniquely different. Any specific demographic that deviates from the workplace norm could be perceived as different, including age, sex, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, race, etc. Some people may view them as having a low work ethic, but this perception may stem out of that perceived "otherness."

Soap Opera Star

The seventh common problematic coworker identified by Harden Fritz is the Soap Opera Star.⁷⁶ The soap opera star lives for drama in the workplace. New rumors of office romances? This person will have the 411 and probably a Tumblr page devoted to the couple. For this reason, this person is a busybody to the n^{th} degree and will be overly involved in everyone's business, both at work and in their personal lives. Due to their tendency to engage in drama (both as observers and often as creators), they are perceived as highly distracting by their peers. They spend so much time digging for office gossip that they are typically perceived by others as having a poor work ethic.

Abrasive, Incompetent Harasser

The final type of problematic coworker is the abrasive, incompetent harasser, who is an individual who is highly uncivil in the workplace with a particular emphasis on sexually harassing behavior. This coworker is very similar to the intrusive harasser boss discussed earlier. The abrasive, incompetent harasser is viewed as incompetent and unprofessional in the workplace. This person tends to exhibit high scores on all the problematic work behaviors commonly observed by coworkers.

Mindfulness Activity



There are numerous books on the market designed to help business professionals get along with their coworkers. Like it or not, we all are going to work with people that drive us crazy. So, what's a mindful way to approach these situations when you have to interact with a coworker is far from being mindful. As usual, our first steps should always be attention, intention, and attitude. However, we can only control our perspectives about

others and not their behavior.

Think of a time when you had to interact with a coworker who was not behaving mindfully.

1. How was their behavior problematic? How did you feel challenged by this person?
2. What was the outcome of this person's behavior on your mindfulness practice, your relationship, or your work?
3. If others were involved, how did they respond?
4. What role (if any) did you play in triggering this person's behavior?
5. What will take away from this experience? How can you approach this person more mindfully in the future?

Research Spotlight



In 2017, Stacy Tye-Williams and Kathleen J. Krone wanted to examine the advice given to victims of workplace bullying.⁷⁷ Going into this study, the researchers realized that a lot of the advice given to victims makes it their personal responsibility to end the bullying, "You should just stand up to the bully" or "You're being too emotional this."

In the current study, the researchers interviewed 48 people who had been the victims of workplace bullying (the average age was 28). The participants had

worked on average for 5 ½ years in the organization where they were bullied. Here are the top ten most common pieces of advice victims received:

1. Quit/get out
2. Ignore it/blow it off/do not let it affect you
3. Fight/stand up
4. Stay calm
5. Report the bullying
6. Be quiet/keep mouth shut
7. Be rational
8. Journal
9. Avoid the bully
10. Toughen up

The researchers identified three underlying themes in the advice. First, participants reported they felt they were being told to downplay their emotional experiences as victims. Second, was what the researchers called the “dilemma of advice,” or the tendency to believe that the advice given wasn’t realistic and wouldn’t change anything. Many who followed the advice reported that it made things worse, not better. Lastly, the researchers noted the “paradox of advice.” Some participants wouldn’t offer advice because bullying is a contextual issue that requires a more contextually based approach. Yet others admitted that they offered the same advice to others that they’d been offered, even when they knew the advice didn’t help them at all.

The researchers concluded, “The results of this study point to a paradoxical relationship between advice and its usefulness. Targets felt that all types of advice are potentially useful. However, the advice either would not have worked in their case or could possibly be detrimental if put into practice.”⁷⁸ Ultimately, the researchers argue that responding to bullying must first take into account the emotions the victim is receiving, and that responses to bullying should be a group and not a single individual’s efforts.

Problem Subordinates

In the two previous sections, we’ve looked at problematic bosses and coworkers; however, subordinates can also pose a challenge in the workplace. For this reason, Harden Fritz identified five clear troublesome subordinates: the okay subordinate, the abrasive harasser, the bully, the different other, and the incompetent renegade.⁷⁹

Okay Subordinate

First, we have the okay subordinate. Just as the name suggests, this person is neither stellar nor awful; they are just OK. This person tends to be a mildly annoying busybody at work. Still, none of their behavior rises to the status where a supervisor would need to step in and formally counsel the employee's behavior.

Abrasive Harasser

Second, we have the abrasive harasser. The abrasive harasser is an individual who needs counseling regularly about what constitutes sexual harassment. They may not even always realize what type of behavior are appropriate in the workplace. For example, this subordinate could forward their supervisor a sexual joke via email without thinking others could perceive the joke as inappropriate in the workplace. On the more advanced end, you have people who are perpetual sexual harassers who need to be severely counseled to protect the organization and start the process of firing the person for harassing behavior.

The Bully

The next common problem subordinate is the bully. According to Harden Fritz, this subordinate is one “who bosses others, usurps authority, is competitive and is at the same time insecure.”⁸⁰ If this person's behavior is not curtailed by their supervisor, this type of behavior can quickly become infectious and end up hurting cohesion throughout the entire office. Furthermore, supervisors need to recognize this behavior and ensure that the targets of the bully have a safe and secure work environment. Don't be surprised if this person decides to bully upward, or attempt to bully their supervisor, because it can happen.

The Different Other

The fourth common problem subordinate is the different other. Just like the two previous versions of “difference” discussed for bosses and coworkers, the different other is a subordinate who is perceived as distinctly different from their supervisor. One thing we know from years of management research is that people who are perceived as different from their supervisors are less likely to enjoy protective and mentoring relationships with their supervisors. As such, when a supervisor views someone as a “different other,” they may engage in subconscious discriminatory behavior toward their subordinate.

Incompetent Renegade

Finally, we have the incompetent renegade. This individual is ethically incompetent and views themselves as above the law within the organization. This individual may view themselves as superior to the organization from the outset, which causes numerous problems within the office. However, instead of accomplishing their work, this person is more likely to take credit for others' work. If this subordinate continues behaving in this manner, they will be viewed by others as running the place. For this reason, subordinates should stop this behavior when they observe it and immediately

initiate counseling to address the issue and build a case for termination if the behavior does not cease.

Key Takeaways

- Workplace deviance refers to the voluntary behavior of organizational members that violates significant organizational norms and practices, or threatens the well-being of the organization and its members.
- Janie Harden Fritz categorized six types of problematic bosses: different, okay good old boy/girl, toxic, self-centered taskmaster, and intrusive harasser. First, the different boss is someone a subordinate sees as distractingly different from them as a person. Second, the good old boy/girl boss considers the “old ways of doing things” as best, even when they’re problematic. Third, the OK boss is kind and average in just about every way possible, coasting toward retirement. Fourth, the toxic boss is seen as unethical, obnoxious, and unprofessional by their subordinates. Fifth, the self-centered taskmaster is entirely concerned with completing tasks with no concern for developing relationships with their followers. Lastly, the intrusive harasser boss tends to be highly interfering and often wants to get caught up in their subordinates’ personal and professional lives.
- Janie Harden Fritz categorized eight types of problematic coworkers: adolescent (wants to be the center of attention and get nothing done), bully (is overly demanding of their peers and takes credit for their work), mild annoyance (they engage in disruptive behaviors regularly but not to a drastic degree), independent self-promoter (likes to toot their own horn), pushy playboy/playgirl (pushes people into doing things for them), independent other (perceived as distinctly different from their coworkers), soap opera star (loves to gossip and be in the middle of all of the workplace drama), and the abrasive, incompetent harasser (is highly uncivil in the workplace with a special emphasis in sexually harassing behavior).
- Janie Harden Fritz categorized five types of problematic subordinates: the okay subordinate, the abrasive harasser, the bully, the different other, and the incompetent renegade. First, the okay substitute is a follower who is neither stellar nor awful, but rather very much middle of the road. Second, the abrasive harasser is an individual who tends to be someone who needs counseling regularly about what constitutes sexual harassment. Third, the bully is someone who bosses their peers around, usurps authority, and engages in hypercompetitive behavior when competition is not necessary (all signs of someone who is deeply insecure). Fourth, the different other is a follower who is perceived as distinctly different from their supervisor. Finally, the

incompetent renegade is ethically incompetent and views themselves as above the law within the organization.

Exercises

1. Which of the six types of problematic bosses would you have the most problem working for? Why?
2. In both the coworker and subordinate categories, “difference” is viewed as a problem in the workplace. Why do you think so many workers have a problem with differences? How should management approach situations where differences are impacting coworker relationships or leader-follower relationships?
3. Think of a time when you’ve worked with a problematic coworker. Which of Janie Harden Fritz’s eight types of problematic coworkers did your coworker fit into (it’s possible to fit into more than one)? How did you handle this coworker relationship?

Key Terms

career strategizing

collegial peers

cost escalation

depersonalization

deviant workplace behavior

directive support

ease of opportunity

emotional vampires

ethics

excuse-making

followership

formal language

informal language

information peers

jargon

leader-member exchange

personal responsibility

profession

professionalism

relational maintenance

romantic workplace relationship

similarity

social support

special peer

state-of-the-relationship talk

supportive leadership behavior

the hookup

time

Chapter Wrap-Up

At the beginning of this chapter, we discussed how a good chunk of our lives is spent at work, so engaging in a range of interpersonal relationships in the workplace is unavoidable. We started the chapter by defining the term “professionalism” and what it means to be a professional in today’s workplace. We then scratched the surface of the communication and leadership research that examines leadership and followership. We then discussed one of the most common relationships we have in the workplace, the coworker relationship. Coworker relationships were followed by an examination of romantic entanglements in the workplace, along with their pros and cons. We conclude this chapter by examining problematic interpersonal relationships in the workplace.

Chapter Exercises

Real-World Case Study

Morren Michaels had been working with Raja Rahal for several years, and the two were pretty friendly with each other. They went out to eat after work and often strategized on how to improve their office. The two weren’t exactly best friends in the workplace, but they were friends.

Out of nowhere, Morren is promoted by the company’s CEO and asked to take over the reins of her division. Initially, things were going smoothly. Morren had no problems, and she had the division being more profitable than it had under the previous manager. However, Morren quickly realized she was going to have problems with her old friend Raja. Almost immediately, Raja pointed out that Morren was “not one of us” anymore to the rest of the division since Morren was now in management. At first, it was a snide remark, but things quickly started escalating.

Anytime Raja wouldn’t get her way, she would email everyone up the corporate ladder with her complaints against Morren (e.g., the head of HR, the CEO, the chief operating officer, etc.). In Morren’s mind, all she was doing was expecting the same level of work from Raja as she did from anyone else in her division. One day in a meeting, Morren asked Raja to take on a new project. Surprisingly, Raja said yes and thought it was a good fit for her. Morren asked Raja to give the group an update on the project at the next meeting.

Throughout the next month, Morren checked in with Raja to see how the project was going. Raja scheduled a couple of meetings with Morren to discuss the project, but had to cancel because she or her child was sick. Morren even suggested meeting at a coffee shop near Raja’s house to make things easier, but Raja had to bail out because she’d forgotten she’d scheduled another appointment.

Ultimately, the day of the next meeting came. When Morren arrived at the place on the agenda where Raja was supposed to report, Raja looked at the entire group and said, “I never agreed to do that.” Morren sat stunned as the rest of the division sat there uncomfortably. Finally, Morren pulled herself together and informed Raja that she had indeed agreed to take on the project. And that the meeting minutes from the previous meeting along with the tape recording of the last meeting, the secretary kept had her agreeing.

After the meeting, Morren returns to her office and closes the door. She's a bit dumbfounded by what transpired. After the meeting, many of her coworkers came up to her to see if she was OK. They all said variations of the same thing, "We heard her agree to take on the project last month." Thankfully, Morren had the secretary record their meetings to make taking notes easier. She then uploaded the audio recordings to an internal server so that all department members could relisten to them if necessary.

Morren sat at her desk and opened her email and quickly noticed an email from Raja. Morren could only imagine what the email would say. As she read the email, she was concerned at how twisted the facts of what had transpired had become. Raja accused Morren of embarrassing her during the meeting by falsely accusing her of not having done her job. Of course, the email was copied to everyone within the division and the higher corporate hierarchy.

1. Why do you think Morren and Raja's relationship changed when Morren took on a position of leadership?
2. What type of problematic follower do you think Raja is?
3. If you were Morren, what would your next step be? Why?

Chapter Assignment

Valuing Others in the Workplace

Humans thrive when valued. We see this in the fields of communication, psychology, industrial psychology, and medicine just to name a few. Colman McCarthy in his article, ["How a rabbit study and an ex-student boost my hopes for a future of kindness"](#), discusses how humans (and rabbits) thrive when cared for or when given just a little attention. Today, we often hear the phrase "I 'see' you" or "I want to be 'seen' and heard". Whatever "seen" means to you – is what it means to you – that's the point. It means something different to all of us. In the workplace, as leaders, colleagues, and followers, we will need to work to make others feel seen, to feel valued, to engage humanely with others. We need to work to increase peace. Your task for this assignment is to write your philosophy on valuing others in the work place. How do you make others feel valued? How do you identify strengths in others? How will you give others the professional space to use those strengths with full, unabashed support? How will you create a space of community, oneness, and shared interests? Human relations theory tells us that humans thrive in workplaces where they are allowed to contribute and work spontaneously. How will you promote this type of environment?

Write a 1.5 to 2 page double space philosophy. You do not need to address every question above. The questions were meant to get you thinking. You can take your philosophy in any direction you choose. Don't underestimate the power of metacognition about how we operate in the organization. We need firmly grounded guiding principles to serve as our beacons during easy times, but especially during challenging times.

At the end of the semester, update your philosophy, by incorporating 5 concepts from the course. This philosophy will set you up to have your own set of guiding principles in the workplace.

End-of-Chapter Assessment

1. In an attempt to make herself look good in the organization, Agotha tends to hoard information. If something important comes across her desk, she tends to keep it instead of giving it to the people who could use the information. What type of unethical organizational communication is Agotha engaging in, according to W. Charles Redding?
 - a. coercive
 - b. destructive
 - c. deceptive
 - d. intrusive
 - e. secretive
2. Which of the following is NOT a way to take personal responsibility in the workplace?
 - a. Acknowledge that you are responsible for your choices in the workplace.
 - b. Acknowledge that you are responsible for how you feel at work.
 - c. Accept that you can control your stress and feelings of burnout.
 - d. Decide to take control of your attitudes, thoughts, and behaviors.
 - e. Decide to let your supervisor determine the best path for your self-improvement.
3. During a meeting, Baraba says, “I will not be joining the rest of the group this weekend at the trade show due to a pre-arranged meeting I have had on my schedule for a few months.” The use of the words “will not” and “I have” instead of their contraction forms are examples of what type of language use?
 - a. Common
 - b. Formal
 - c. Informal
 - d. Jargon
 - e. Peripheral
4. At work, Stella has an inherent need to be seen as her supervisor’s peer and not as an underling. Stella does support her supervisor, but she has no problem confronting her supervisor when Stella thinks her supervisor is making a bad decision. According to Ira Chaleff, what type of follower is Stella?
 - a. Avoider
 - b. Implementer
 - c. Individualist
 - d. Partner
 - e. Resource
5. Susan always looks at her coworker Polly as a kind of problem. Polly came from a very religious upbringing and didn’t seem to fit in with the rest of the people who work at GenCorp. For example, when Susan and her coworkers go out to eat, Polly doesn’t join them because her male colleagues will be there. Polly also doesn’t have any sense of pop culture at all. At a meeting recently, someone mentioned Lady Gaga, and Polly asked if she was a member of British royalty. Although everyone had a good laugh and Polly played along, Susan could tell that Polly was completely unaware of why her question was funny. According to Janie

Harden Fritz, Polly is an example of what kind of “problematic coworker” for Susan?

- a. The Adolescent
- b. The Mild Annoyance
- c. The Independent Other
- d. The Soap Opera Star
- e. The Pushy Playgirl

Notes

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Chapter 14: The Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication



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In this chapter, we will examine the darker aspects of interpersonal communication. Communication often yields positive outcomes, but it can also lead to hurt, conflict, psychological damage, and relationship termination. The dark side of interpersonal communication refers to communication that results in negative outcomes. Some types of communication that are considered to be on the “dark side” are: verbal aggression, deception, psychological abuse, bullying, and infidelity, to name a few. For many years, communication scholars have failed to focus on the more negative aspects of communication, thereby overlooking opportunities to create solutions for those who are on the receiving end of this type of communication and for those who are the source. This chapter will explore destructive behaviors in relationships and negative communication strategies. Awareness of these negative communication strategies may be the first step in preventing them.

Destructive Relationship Behaviors

Learning Objectives

1. Describe the concept of secret testing in romantic relationships.
2. Explain the impact of empty apologies on relationship dynamics.
3. Differentiate between Internet infidelity and emotional infidelity.
4. Identify common types of hurtful messages in interpersonal relationships.
5. Summarize typical reactions individuals have to hurtful messages.

Healthy relationships require open communication, trust, and mutual respect; however, many individuals engage in behaviors that can harm or destroy their romantic partnerships. These destructive patterns often emerge from uncertainty, insecurity, or poor communication skills, leading people to employ indirect strategies to test their relationships, offer meaningless apologies, engage in infidelity, or communicate in ways that cause emotional harm. Understanding these harmful behaviors—including secret testing, empty apologies, Internet infidelity, and hurtful communication—is essential for recognizing when relationships are at risk and developing healthier ways to navigate romantic challenges. By examining these destructive patterns, we can gain a deeper understanding of how relationships deteriorate and learn to identify warning signs before irreparable damage occurs.

Secret Testing

Very often, in relationships, individuals seek to understand the nature or state of their relationship. The most direct way to understand a relationship is to talk about it, but sometimes the timing doesn't seem right. Perhaps it's too soon, or maybe the relational partner is squeamish about talking about the issue. Regardless, individuals experience considerable uncertainty about the relationship. Uncertainty also exists when relationships seem to be headed toward termination.

Humans engage in intrapersonal communication, thinking about how their dating partner feels about them or whether the individual wishes to continue the relationship. A great deal of time may be spent thinking about how the partner feels. Suppose you have ever called a friend to ask your friend's opinion about how your boyfriend or girlfriend feels about you. In that case, you are engaging in information seeking about your relationship. In the early stages of relationships, the relational partners may not share the same definition of the relationship.¹ As a result, one or both relational partners experience uncertainty. Research demonstrates that individuals experiencing uncertainty will work to reduce uncertainty.² As research continued, it was determined that it is taboo to talk directly with a relationship partner about the state-of-the-relationship.³ Consider your own experiences with dating and whether it is comfortable to ask or be asked, “so, where are we? Are we dat-

ing exclusively, seeing other people...?” Due to the discomfort of such direct questions, individuals often employ indirect strategies.

There are seven indirect strategies individuals use to assess the state of their relationship. These indirect strategies are referred to as **secret tests**. Some secret tests actually employ negative relational strategies, such as provoking jealousy, deliberately behaving negatively toward a partner, being overly demanding, intentionally creating distance, and testing a partner through a third party, often referred to as a “fidelity check.” Many secret tests may result in relational hurt or even relationship termination.

Secret tests include directness, endurance, indirect suggestions, public presentation, separation, third-party, and triangle tests.

Directness Test

Directness is the least secretive of the strategies and involves asking the relational partner about his/her feelings toward the relationship and commitment to the relationship. Alternatively, an individual might disclose their feelings about the relationship with the hope that the relationship partner will reciprocate. Although this “test” may not feel comfortable at first, it can have positive outcomes and involves open communication. Though employing this test may lead to answers that one may not want to hear, at least information is obtained directly from the relationship partner. Research conducted by Melanie Booth-Butterfield and Rebecca Chory-Assad⁴ indicates that individuals in more stable relationships are more likely to use this overt strategy.

Endurance Test

Endurance test is another form of secret testing in which the partner is tested by engaging in actions that the partner might perceive as a cost in the relationship. If a partner remains in the relationship, it is presumed that they are committed to it. Research revealed three types of endurance tests: behaving negatively toward the partner, criticizing oneself to the point of being annoying, and making a request that required the partner to exert a great deal of effort. Because the endurance test involves introducing cost into the relationship, individuals risk tipping the scales, i.e., creating more costs than rewards, which social exchange theory tells us may result in relationship dissolution. Melanie Booth-Butterfield and Rebecca Chory-Assad explored secret test use in deteriorating relationships.⁵ Their research revealed that in unstable relationships, any secret test involving behaviors that deviated from what one would normally do in a relationship was associated with a desire for relationship disengagement.

Indirect Suggestions Test

The third form of secret testing is **indirect suggestions**. Indirect suggestions involve joking or hinting about more serious stages of relationships, such as marriage or having children. If joking about more serious stages in a relationship is met with laughter, flirting, or intimate touching, then it might be assumed that the partner is interested in pursuing a more serious relationship. Another indirect suggestion comes in the form of increasingly intimate touch. If the intimate touch

is received positively or reciprocated, then it is also assumed that there is a commitment to the relationship.

Presenting the Relationship to Outsiders Test

The fourth form of secret testing involves **presenting the relationship to outsiders** as a relationship in which a mutual commitment is involved. This public presentation gauges the partner's response. For example, you might change your Facebook status to "in a relationship" to gauge your partner's reaction. Another example is introducing your relationship partner as a girlfriend/boyfriend and observing the reaction. This secret test is risky because it may cause a public rejection. The advantage is that it might cause public acceptance.

Separation Test

A fifth secret test is the **separation test**. Have you ever been in the beginning stages of a relationship and found it necessary to travel and hoped that your new relationship would survive the physical distance? At times, individuals intentionally create physical distance to test the strength of the relationship. If the relationship survives a few days of separation, then this is an affirmation that the partner is committed. If the relationship partner does not attempt to make contact during the physical separation, then this may be a sign that there is a less-than-desirable level of interest.

Third-Party Test

The sixth form of secret testing is **third-party testing**. Here, one might seek the opinion or insight from the partner's friends, family members, or coworkers. Because your perception of your relationship may be different, it is wise to seek more information about a partner from people they are close to. You might realize that they behave and communicate differently with these people. Often time, you can tell a lot about a person from the people they spend their time with the most. This will give you more information about their personality and their interests.

Triangle Test

The final form of secret testing is the **triangle test**. This test involves manipulating a third person to obtain information about the relationship. A common form of triangle testing is to induce a jealous reaction by mentioning an interested third party. For example, a relationship partner might be told that a classmate was making flirtatious advances in class. The partner's reaction to this information is presumed to be an indicator of the partner's commitment. A "fidelity check" is another form of triangle testing in which a situation is created to allow the partner to "cheat." The partner's reaction is then observed.

In more recent research, Rebecca Chory-Assad and Melanie Booth-Butterfield determined that relationship partners use different strategies when attempting to maintain a relationship than when attempting to end a relationship.⁶ These researchers determined that relationship partners who wish to maintain a relationship when the relationship seems to come to an end will use the direct secret test in which the partner is approached directly. Individuals who wish to end a relationship will do

so by utilizing a secret test such as jealousy. Still, these individuals also report having low self-esteem. They concluded that individuals with low self-esteem might use secret testing to “break up” because they do not have the confidence to talk with their partner directly.

Empty Apologies

Apologies are a necessary part of everyday interactions and are important for correcting either intentional or unintentional harm caused to others. Despite the positive aspect of apologizing, it is often difficult to do. If your parents/guardians ever required you to apologize to a sibling, then you may recall the difficulty of uttering the words, “I apologize.” Conversely, some individuals use apologies so frequently that the apology becomes meaningless. An apology implies acknowledgment of wrongdoing.⁷

Acknowledgment includes expression of responsibility, conveyance of remorse and direct request for forgiveness. Acknowledgment of wrongdoing should imply that there will be an effort to avoid repeated occurrences of the same behavior. Regardless of the difficulties presented by the need to apologize, the positive aspects must be considered. Apologies have positive benefits such as increased feelings of empathy for the offender⁸ and reducing the consequences for an offender.⁹ Individuals who offer more elaborate apologies receive more favorable evaluation, are blamed less, forgiven more, and liked more by the individuals to whom an apology is made. *Apology Sincerity* influences how the victim feels after the negative event.¹⁰ Apology sincerity may alleviate strong negative emotions, including anger. Sincere apologies may also lead victims to think about conflict less negatively and be less vengeful.

Internet Infidelity

The time spent online by a wide range of people makes the Internet an adequate “meeting place” for relationships of all types. The Internet shrinks our world and enables individuals to connect with others who share similar interests, possess valuable knowledge (such as health information, cleaning tips, or the best campgrounds), and possess attractive qualities. We might consider that the Internet provides privacy, the ability to interact frequently, and enables close proximity. Research shows that when it comes to Internet infidelity, partners perceive their infidelity to be more acceptable than their partner’s infidelity. Also, males find involving/goal-directed acts (making plans, expressing love) as more acceptable than women.¹¹ Because of the murky nature of what constitutes infidelity via the Internet, researchers have worked to define it accurately. **Internet infidelity** is defined as using “sexual energy of any sort—thoughts, feelings, and behaviors—outside of a committed sexual relationship in such a way that it damages the relationship, and then pretending that this drain in energy will affect neither partner nor the relationship as long as it remains undiscovered.”¹² Partners take a harsher approach to Internet infidelity with their partners than themselves.¹³ Specifically, the researchers concluded that there is a double standard in Internet infidelity. Individuals find the Internet infidelity of their partner to be worse than their Internet infidelity. Also, relational partners use self-motivated rules regarding Internet infidelity and have different expectations for self than for

the relationship partner. Internet infidelity led to the murder of Google executive Forrest Hayes, who was described as a loving father and husband. Hayes made an unfortunate decision to make contact with Alix Tichelman on SeekingArrangement.com. After meeting with Tichelman several times, she injected him with an overdose of heroin, and he was found dead on his yacht in Santa Cruz's Craft Harbor the next day. According to the Washington Post, the woman coldly injected him with heroin and simply walked away. Her actions were caught on camera and she is now on trial for.¹⁴

Internet Characteristics Fostering Online Infidelity

Several characteristics identified through research contribute to the ease of forming relationships via the Internet.^{15 16 17} First, the Internet increases the speed with which messages are sent. Consider the difference in sending messages today in comparison to the early 1990s. Mail and landline phones were the primary means of communicating "quickly." The widespread use of email and instant messaging increased the speed at which people could communicate. Reach is another characteristic of the Internet, which enables individuals to establish many more relationships than in the past. Relationships were previously established within our immediate vicinity, including our hometown, workplace, places for social gatherings, and churches. Now, our computers and smartphones put us in touch with people all over the world without ever leaving our homes. Anonymity (revelation of identity or lack thereof) also opens up opportunities for relationships. Consider the case of Manti Te'o in which anonymity allowed him to be fooled into believing that he had a girlfriend and that she died as the result of leukemia.¹⁸

Finally, interactivity, defined as the ability to send and receive messages and respond to them, makes the Internet a breeding ground for infidelity. An additional characteristic of the Internet that may deceive individuals into thinking that they are not engaged in infidelity is the lack of physical presence, which makes infidelity ambiguous. After all, if one is not physically present, how can one cheat?

Research Spotlight



Tony Docan-Morgan and Carol A. Docan set out to examine how men and women view Internet infidelity in a 2007 study.¹⁹ The researchers began by having 43 undergraduates list what they thought constituted Internet infidelity. The researchers reviewed the open-ended responses and pared down the list to:

- having cybersex (engaging in sexually explicit conversations with someone online)
- flirtatious behavior (flirting with someone they met online)
- emotional (developing an emotional connection with someone online)
- seeking another (posting a personal ad online)

- conversing with another (having a conversation with someone online)
- exchanging information (giving personal information about yourself online – e.g., email address, cellphone number, etc.).
- other (engaging in casual conversational topics, not relational or emotional ones)

Based on these six categories and other literature on the subject, the researchers developed a measure and narrowed it down to 27 items. The measure ultimately discovered two different patterns of Internet infidelity *superficial/informal acts* (e.g., chatting about sports, talking about current events, joking, etc.) and *involving/goal-directed* (e.g., disclosing love, viewing personal ads, making plans to meet someone, etc.).

The researchers found that superficial/informal acts were rated as less severe than involving/goal-directed ones. When it came to the severity of superficial/informal acts, there were no differences between females and males in this study. However, females found involving/goal-directed Internet infidelity to be more severe than did men. Last, the researchers found people rated their Internet infidelity as less severe than they rated their partner's infidelity on both involving/goal-directed and superficial/informal acts.

Emotional vs. Sexual Infidelity

The lack of physical presence in online relationships drives the need to differentiate between sexual infidelity and emotional infidelity. Physical interaction with another individual constitutes sexual infidelity. Still, some individuals might say that as long as there is no sexual intercourse, then there has been no infidelity. If we can't all agree on when cheating has occurred after physical contact, then it is easy to see why there is a great deal of disagreement about what constitutes emotional infidelity. One might even question whether emotional attachment to an infidel outside of one's primary relationship constitutes infidelity at all. Sexual infidelity involves sexual intimacy and physical involvement. In contrast, emotional infidelity includes "emotional involvement with another person, which leads one's partner to channel emotional resources such as romantic love, time, and attention to someone else."²⁰ For example, if you receive a promotion at work, it might be assumed that the first person you would tell would be your relational partner. However, if emotional resources have been directed toward another individual, then this individual may be the first individual you might call. The relationship partner might view this as a betrayal or a dependence on another individual.

It was initially proposed that women would perceive emotional infidelity as worse than sexual infidelity and that men would perceive sexual infidelity in their partners as worse than emotional infidelity. This proposal developed from the evolutionary psychology perspective. In summary, this perspective indicates that males would be concerned with sexual infidelity because they had no way of knowing whether their mate was carrying their child and thus carrying on their genetic material. Women were more concerned with emotional infidelity because women feared that their male counterparts would become attached to another female and that his resources (e.g., money, time, etc.)

would be directed toward the other. Although this perspective provides insight into the basic differences between perspectives that might be held by females and males, research consistently shows that both females and males find sexual infidelity to be worse than emotional infidelity.²¹

Researchers reported that sexual infidelity occurred in 30% to 40% of relationships.²² When sexual infidelity occurs, research shows that how infidelity is discovered determines relational outcomes.²³ Voluntary admission seems to result in increased forgiveness, less likelihood of dissolution, and was the least damaging to relational quality.

Hurtful Messages

“Even in the closest, most satisfying relationships, people sometimes say things that hurt each other.”²⁴ We have all been in the position of having our feelings hurt or hurting the feelings of another. When feelings are hurt, individuals respond in many different ways. Though hurtful messages have existed since humans began interacting, it was in 1994 that Anita L. Vangelisti first developed a typology of hurtful messages. Her work resulted in ten types of messages.²⁵ She furthered her work by exploring reactions to hurtful messages. First, we will discuss her typology of hurtful messages, and then we will address how individuals respond to hurtful messages.

Types of Hurtful Messages

Communication researcher Anita L. Vangelisti first developed a comprehensive typology of hurtful messages in 1994,²⁶ recognizing that even in the closest and most satisfying relationships, people sometimes say things that cause emotional pain to one another. Hurtful messages are communicative acts that intentionally or unintentionally inflict emotional harm on the recipient, damaging self-esteem, trust, and relational satisfaction. These messages can range from direct attacks to seemingly innocent comments that carry deeper implications. Vangelisti’s research identified ten distinct categories of hurtful communication, each representing different ways that words can wound and create lasting emotional scars in our most important relationships.

Evaluations

Evaluations are messages that assess the value or worth of something. These messages are a negative assessment of the other individual that results in hurt. One of the coauthors was once riding in a car with a coworker and his wife. He was driving and made an error. She said, “You are the worst driver ever.” The moment was awkward for everyone.

Accusation

The second type of hurtful message is an accusation. Accusations are an assignment of fault or blame. A wide range of topics can be addressed in accusations. A common source of conflict in relationships is money. An example of an accusation that might arise for conflict over money is “You are the reason this family is in constant financial turmoil” or “You are always spending money on silly things.”

Directives

Directives are the third type of hurtful message, and involve an order or a command. “Go to hell” is a common directive in some relationships depicted in movies and television, but it is a more extreme example. In everyday interaction, examples might include, “Leave me alone,” “Don’t ever call me again,” or “Stay away from me.” One of the coauthors remembers a short-lived relationship in which she called her boyfriend’s house. The boyfriend had told his mother that he was out with her. The phone call to his house ultimately resulted in the boyfriend being punished for lying. Still, he relayed a potentially hurtful message to the coauthor, which was, “Don’t ever call my house unless I ask you to.” As noted, the relationship was short-lived, but the hurtful message indicating a lack of value for the coauthor’s feelings still stings.

Informative Statements

Informative statements are hurtful messages that reveal unwanted information. A supervisor might reveal the following to an employee: “I only hired you because the owner made me.” Siblings might reveal, “I never wanted a younger sister,” or “When Mother was dying, she told me I was her favorite.” Friends might say something like, “When you got a job at the same place as me, I felt smothered.” Informative messages reveal information that could easily be kept a secret, but are intended to hurt.

Statement of Desire

A statement of desire expresses an individual’s preference. A romantic partner might state, “The night I met you, I was more interested in your friend and really wanted to go out with him.” A friend might say, “Callie has always been a better friend than you.” A parent/guardian with multiple children might state, “God only gives you one good child.”

Advising Statement

An advising statement calls for a course of action, such as, “You need to get yourself some help.” One of the coauthors inadvertently communicated an advising statement when a friend was discussing the frequency of interviews and the difficulty of getting hired. The coauthor said, “There are courses that offer interview training. You could take a course in interviewing.” The statement hurt the coauthor’s friend, as she was only seeking comfort and not advice, which seemed to indicate that she had poor interview skills.

Question

A question is another type of hurtful message that, when asked, implies something negative. A very direct hurtful question is, “What is wrong with you?” Another subtler question that might be perceived as hurtful is, “You’ve been at the bank for ten years. Have you been promoted yet?”

Threats

Threats are messages that show a desire to inflict harm. Harm can be physical or psychological. For example, a romantic partner might say, “If you go out with your friends tonight, I’m going to break up with you.” A direct physical threat is a statement directed toward inflicting bodily harm, such as, “I’m going to knock the crap out of you if you don’t change out of that outfit ” or “I will make sure you never walk again if you walk out on me.”

Jokes

Jokes are another type of hurtful message that involves a prank or witticism. For example, a cousin might say to his athletically built female cousin, “What’s up quarterback thighs?” implying that the female’s looks are masculine. In an organization, a coworker could jokingly comment to a supervisor on the supervisor’s relationship with a subordinate, “I can see who’s really in charge here.” A prank can be hurtful if it results in humiliating or embarrassing the object of the prank. Pranks are sometimes carried too far. *The Breakfast Club* includes a perfect example of a prank carried too far when the jock explains that he and his wrestling buddies duct-taped the butt cheeks of a nerd. It was meant to be funny, but results in physical injury to the nerd. Jokes in the form of witticisms are often open to interpretation, but hurt may result if the recipient feels that the sender intended to hurt more so than humor. Pranks that embarrass or cause physical harm often create emotional pain for the recipient.

Lies

Lies are deceptive speech acts that result in the hurt of the recipient. In an episode of *The King of Queens*, Doug tells his wife Carrie that her forehead is too big after she hurt his feelings. He didn’t really feel that way, but his words resulted in Carrie trying to cover her forehead because she was embarrassed that her forehead was “too big.” Lies can range from the mundane, such as “I was late for dinner because I was on the phone with my boss,” to “I’m going to San Diego on business.” Lies, when discovered, may cause feelings of being disrespected or betrayed.

Reactions to Hurtful Messages

After exploring the types of hurtful messages that exist, Anita Vangelisti and Linda Crumley investigated the reactions individuals have to hurtful messages.²⁷ The results of Vangelisti’s and Crumley’s investigation revealed three broad categories of reactions: active verbal responses, acquiescent responses, and invulnerable responses.

Active verbal responses involve attacking the other, defending the self, and asking for an explanation. Suppose that you and a romantic partner go to a friend’s house for dinner. Upon entering the home, you take off your shoes. Your romantic partner poses a hurtful question, such as “What is wrong with you? What kind of guest takes off their shoes?” An active verbal response that attacks the other is, “Nothing is wrong with me. What’s wrong with you, you idiot? Everybody knows wearing street shoes brings in germs and allergens.” Alternatively, one might respond by saying, “Nothing is wrong with me. It is perfectly normal to take one’s shoes off when entering another per-

son's home." Finally, one might ask for an explanation, such as, "Why do you think there is something wrong with me?"

Acquiescent responses involve crying, conceding, or apologizing. This type of response indicates that the message is perceived as hurtful or that the recipient believes they have committed some wrongdoing. For example, if a friend says, "I never want to see you again," a conceding response might be, "That's fine. I won't bother you anymore." Alternatively, an apologetic response is, "I am so sorry. Is there something I can do to change your mind?"

Finally, hurtful messages can result in invulnerable responses. We have all heard the phrase "Sticks and stones may hurt my bones, but words will never hurt me." This phrase, although not entirely accurate, conveys a desire to appear invulnerable. Reactions of invulnerability range from ignoring the message to laughing. Recall the example from the directive message earlier in which one of the coauthors was told not to call the boyfriend's house. Although the coauthor felt that the message was disrespectful, the response was to laugh. The boyfriend was told that his "directive" was ridiculous and that if she was going to be used as an excuse, then he should be smart enough to let her in on that little secret unless he was lying to her, too.

Key Takeaways

- When individuals feel uncertain about their romantic relationships, they may engage in secret tests—indirect strategies used to assess a partner's feelings or commitment. These include tactics like separation, public presentation, or provoking jealousy.
- Empty apologies lack sincerity and fail to include an acknowledgment of wrongdoing, remorse, or a commitment to change. These insincere acts can undermine trust and hinder efforts to repair relationships.
- Internet infidelity often involves emotional or sexual engagement online and can be difficult to define. Partners may view their behavior as less problematic than that of their partner, and cultural double standards can complicate perceptions of betrayal.
- Hurtful messages encompass a wide range of communicative acts, including accusations, directives, lies, and insensitive jokes. These messages can cause significant emotional damage even when not intended to do so.
- People respond to hurtful messages in three primary ways: active verbal responses (e.g., defending or confronting), acquiescent responses (e.g., crying or apologizing), and invulnerable responses (e.g., laughing or ignoring).

Exercises

1. Review the 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.
2. Create your definition of emotional infidelity. Ask three friends to come up with their definitions of emotional infidelity. Compare and contrast the four definitions.
 3. After reading the section on Internet infidelity and Internet characteristics, find your example in the popular media that relates to one characteristic 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.
 4. Working in a group, create an example of each type of a 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.

The Dark Side of Relationships: Aggression

Learning Objectives

1. Define relational aggression and its common manifestations.
2. Identify patterns of relational aggression among women in social and academic contexts.
3. Explain the concept of verbal aggression and its psychological impact.
4. Describe the different bullying, including workplace bullying and cyberbullying.
5. Summarize strategies for addressing destructive interpersonal behavior.

While relationships can bring tremendous joy and fulfillment, they also have the potential to become sources of significant harm and emotional pain. The dark side of interpersonal communication encompasses various forms of aggressive behavior that damage relationships and cause psychological distress to victims. These destructive patterns include relational aggression, which manipulates social connections; verbal attacks that target an individual’s self-worth; bullying behaviors that exploit power imbalances; and deceptive communication that undermines trust. Understanding these harmful communication patterns is crucial for recognizing warning signs, protecting ourselves and others from emotional damage, and developing healthier ways to navigate conflict and express difficult emotions in our personal and professional relationships.

Relational Aggression

Relational aggression is defined as behaviors that harm others.²⁸ Harm is created through damaging social relationships or feelings of acceptance. Research on relational aggression suggests that it encompasses 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. *Nonconfrontational* or indirect behaviors include spreading rumors, gossiping, and social manipulation.^{29,30} 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.³¹ 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.³² Based on open-ended descriptions from high school girls, the following categories of relational aggression were found: the physical threat/physical attack, rejection, humiliation, betrayal, personal attack, boy manipulation, and relational depreciation. Besides 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.^{33,34}

Relational Aggression in College: Bad and Normal

Current research shows that relational aggression begins in childhood and extends into the workplace. Maintaining awareness of this tendency may help avoid such situations in the future. A challenge with relational aggression among women is that it is negative and yet labeled as normal.^{35,36 37} Evidence of this dual perspective on relational aggression among women is found within the media in movies such as *Mean Girls* (also a Broadway musical). Because of the acceptance of this behavior as negative and normal, conversations were held with women to understand their explanation for engaging in negative behavior. Through these conversations, several themes emerged. These themes included (a) girls will be girls; (b) relational aggression as venting; (c) blaming the victim; (d) minimizing their role; and (e) regret. The “girls will be girls” theme is especially problematic because it indicates that women know that relational aggression has negative consequences, but they accept it as normal. Researchers report that college-aged women, when discussing relational aggression, made such statements as, “Something you expect [among women], drama and gossip and cattiness” and “Typical girl stuff.” They concluded that women continue to engage in relational aggression because it is perceived to be normal. It is acceptable because everyone is doing it.⁴⁰

The second theme that emerged in discussions of relational aggression among college-aged women was relational aggression as venting. Women regularly described gossiping, name-calling and talking behind someone’s back as cathartic in nature. It was described as a form of stress relief. It was concluded that women view this form of communication as acceptable because it is beneficial.

This “excuse” makes it okay to vent to other women even if it might be harmful if discovered by the target.⁴¹

The third theme among women discussing relational aggression was “blaming the victim.” The majority of women reported that the targets were to blame for the relationally aggressive behavior because they were either “crazy” or engaged in sexually inappropriate behavior. Other reasons given were that the target was either mean to them first or “different.” For example, one girl reported targeting her roommate, whom she knew to be mentally ill. She blamed the girl, stating that the girl should have taken her medicine more regularly to better control her behavior. The majority of women in their study stated that they engage in relational aggression because the target engaged in inappropriate sexual behavior.

A fourth theme related to relational aggression emerged, in which women attempted to minimize their role. Study participants mainly reported that they were simply going along with the actual perpetrator and acted as an audience member. Individuals described themselves as listeners rather than the actual aggressors. Another way in which women attempted to minimize their role was by comparing their behavior to those of others, demonstrating that their behavior was not as aggressive as that of others.

Finally, women discussed feeling regret for having behaved in a relationally aggressive manner. Although the women did express regret, their regret was often accompanied by blaming the victim. For example, participants acknowledged that they felt bad for behaving as they did even though the target was crazy.

Verbal Aggression

Among the most damaging forms of destructive communication is verbal aggression, which directly targets an individual’s sense of self-worth and personal identity. Unlike other forms of conflict that focus on specific issues or behaviors, verbal aggression launches personal attacks designed to inflict psychological harm on the recipient. This form of communication can occur in any relationship context and often escalates conflicts while creating lasting emotional wounds that extend far beyond the immediate argument.

Defining 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 putdown, then you have been the target of verbal aggression.⁴² 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.⁴³ 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 to be acceptable, regardless of whether they have been exposed to verbal aggression in the past.⁴⁴

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.⁴⁵ Thus, the communicator's style of communication impacted the perception of the message. Table 14.1 provides a list of the ten most common examples of verbally aggressive messages.⁴⁶

Table 14.1 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 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.⁴⁷ 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.⁴⁸ Other researchers report three types of bullying: physical, verbal, and relational.⁴⁹

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 them yourself, or witnessing others engage in them. Physical bullying can be prevented by observers, such as teachers or even peers. There are several Public Service Campaigns directed toward bystanders to let them know 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 bullying**. This form of bullying is the manipulation of social relationships to inflict hurt upon another individual.⁵⁰ 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.⁵¹

Verbal Bullying

The third type of bullying is **verbal bullying** and includes threats, degrading comments, teasing, name-calling, putdowns, or sarcastic comments.⁵² 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 help teachers distinguish between playful, prosocial teasing and destructive bullying.⁵³ 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 typically done among friends, often accompanied by laughter 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 imbalance in terms of size, age, or ability.



Figure 14.6 Consequences of Bullying

Cyberbullying

The inherent ease of using the Internet and communicating online has created an excellent and convenient venue for bullying. **Cyberbullying** is intentional harm inflicted through the medium of electronics that is repeated over time.⁵⁴ Cyberbullying affects victims academically and socially with 20% of victims reporting Internet avoidance.⁵⁵ When using electronic communication technologies, young people are exposed to interpersonal violence, social aggression, harassment, and mistreatment.⁵⁶ Cyberbullying includes behaviors such as flaming, which involves posting provocative or abusive posts, and outing where personal information is posted.⁵⁷ 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.

Discovering Self-Concept – Who are you?

What should I do if I'm being bullied, harassed or attacked by someone on Facebook?

Facebook offers these tools to help you deal with bullying and harassment. Depending on the seriousness of the situation:

- Unfriend — Only your Facebook friends can contact you through Facebook chat or post messages on your Timeline.
- Block — This will prevent the person from starting chats and messages with you, adding you as a friend and viewing things you share on your Timeline.
- Report the person or any abusive things they post.
- The best protection against bullying is to learn how to recognize it and how to address and stop it effectively. Here are some tips about what you should — and shouldn't — do:
 - Don't respond. Typically, bullies want to get a response — don't give them one.
 - Don't keep it a secret. Use Facebook's Trusted Friend tool to send a copy of the abusive content to someone you trust who can help you deal with the bullying. This will also generate a report to Facebook.
 - Document and save. If the attacks persist, you may need to report the activity to an ISP and they will want to see the messages.

Visit Facebook's Family Safety Center for more information, tools, and resources.

<https://www.facebook.com/help/116326365118751/>

Research Spotlight



In 2013, Anke Görzig and Kjartan Ólafsson set out to determine what makes a bully a cyberbully.⁵⁸ They recruited 1,000 Internet-using children aged 9–16 in 25 European countries. The researchers also interviewed at least one of the children's parents for the study. The total sample size was 25,142.

The questionnaire used by the researchers was translated into 25 different languages. The interviews took place in the children's home.

Any sensitive questions were asked on a private questionnaire. As you can see, this project was a massive undertaking.

Of the 25,142 participants, 2,821 admitted to engaging in behaviors either online or FtF that could be labeled as bullying.

The researchers found that “cyberbullies (all else being equal) were at least four times as likely to engage in risky online activities and twice as likely to spend more time online as well as finding it easier to be themselves online.”⁵⁹ Furthermore, the researchers found girls

were more likely to engage in cyberbullying than FtF bullying when compared to their male counterparts.

Workplace Bullying Typology

Though it is hard to imagine among adults, bullying continues in the work environment. Bullying can lead to loss of employment, poor attendance, and depression. There are several typologies of bullying. In research conducted with nurses, a comprehensive typology of bullying was developed.⁶⁰ The typology of these researchers includes bullying behavior and related tactics. **Workplace bullying behaviors** involve those seen in Table 14.2. As you can see, workplace bullying behavior involves a wide range of tactics.

Table 14.2 Bullying in the Workplace: Behaviors and Tactics

Behaviors	Tactics
Isolation and exclusion	Being ignored
	Being excluded from conversation
	Being isolated from supportive peers
	Being excluded from activities
Intimidation and threats	Raised voices or raised hands
	Being stared at, watched, and followed
	Tampering with or destroying personal belongings
	Compromising or obstructing patient care
Verbal threats	Being singled out, scrutinized, and monitored
	Being yelled at or verbally abused
	Being stood over, pushed, or shoved
	Belittlement and humiliation
	Verbal putdowns, insults, or humiliation
	Spreading gossip
	Being given a denigrating nickname
	Blamed, made to feel stupid or incompetent
	Suggestions of madness and mental instability
	Mistakes highlighted publicly

Behaviors	Tactics
Damaging professional identity	Public denigration of ability or achievements
	Questioning skills and ability
	Being given demeaning work
	Unsubstantiated negative performance claims
	Spreading rumors, slander, and character slurs
	Questioning competence or credentials
Limiting career opportunities	Denial of opportunities that lead to promotion
	Being overlooked for promotion
	Excluded from committees and activities
	Exclusion from educational opportunities
	Rostered to erode specialist skills
Obstructing work or making work-life difficult	Relocation to make job difficult
	Removal of administrative support
	Excluded from routine information
	Work organized to isolate
	Removal of necessary equipment
	Given excessive or unreasonable workload
	Sabotaging or hampering work
	Varying targets and deadlines
	Excessive scrutiny of work
Denial of due process and natural justice	Denial of due process in meetings
	Denial of meal breaks
	Compiling unsubstantiated written records
	Denial of sick, study, or conference leave
	Unfair rostering practices
	Economic sanctions
	Rostered to lower-paid shift work
	Limiting the opportunity to work

Behaviors	Tactics
	Dismissal from position
	Reclassifying position to lower status

Communicating Effectively

Relationships involve work! The media often portrays relationships as romantic endeavors, while the darker side of relationships remains largely unexplored. In real life, individuals may be inclined to hide relationship difficulties, which further perpetuates the notion that relationships happen and that everyone lives happily ever after.

Communicating Anger

Research repeatedly demonstrates that how emotion is communicated will affect the outcome of the communication situation. Relationship partners are more satisfied when positive emotions are communicated rather than negative emotions. Four forms of anger expression have been identified.⁶¹ The four forms of anger expression range from direct and nonthreatening to avoidance and denial of angry feelings. Anger expression is more productive when the emotion is communicated directly and in a nonthreatening manner. In most circumstances, direct communication is more constructive.

Table 14.3 Forms of Anger Expression

Form of Expression	Explanation of Form
Assertion	Direct statements, nonthreatening, explaining anger
Aggression	Direct and threatening, may involve criticism
Passive Aggression	Indirectly communicate negative affect in a destructive manner – “the silent treatment”
Avoidance	Avoiding the issue, denying angry feelings, pretending not to feel anything

Affirming Communicator Style

When communicating with one’s relational partner, adopting an affirming communicator style may lead to positive outcomes. The affirming communicator style was initially conceptualized to involve friendly, relaxed, and attentive behaviors.⁶² The friendly communicator style involves encouraging others, acknowledging others’ contributions, and being tactful in communication with others. The relaxed style involves being calm and collected, while avoiding nervous mannerisms that indicate tension. Being attentive involves listening carefully to others and demonstrating an empathetic approach to others. Research has demonstrated that the affirming communicator style causes receivers to perceive that there is less verbal aggression.⁶³

Deception

One final aspect of the dark side of interpersonal communication to consider is deceptive communication. We are all familiar with the concept of lying and deception. We are taught from a young age that we should not lie, but we often witness the very people instructing us not to lie engaging in “little white lies” or socially acceptable lies. As communication scholars, we must distinguish between a lie told for the benefit of the receiver and a lie told with more malicious intent. Lies told with more malicious intent are referred to as deception and are the focus of this section. Judee Burgoon and David Buller define deception as, “a deliberate act perpetuated by a sender to engender in a receiver beliefs contrary to what the sender believes is true to put the receiver at a disadvantage.”⁶⁴ Deceptive communication can exist in any type of relationship and in any context. H. Dan O’Hair and Michael Cody discuss deception as a common message strategy that is used in a manner similar to other forms of communication.⁶⁵ They state that deception is often purposeful, goal-directed, and can be used as a relational control device. We will begin our discussion of deception by exploring three types of deception. This discussion will be followed by an exploration of the work of Jennifer Guthrie and Adrienne Kunkel, who discuss why romantic partners use deception and how often.⁶⁶

Types of Deception

Three types of deception are discussed in communication: falsification, concealment, and equivocation.⁶⁷ Falsification is when a source deliberately presents information that is false or fraudulent. For example, the source of deception may claim, “I did not drink when I went out last night,” even though they did drink. Researchers have found that falsification is the most common form of deception.

Concealment is another form of deception in which the source deliberately withholds information. For example, if two partners are living in two different states and one partner is offered a job in the same state as the other partner, but the job offer is not revealed to the other partner, then concealment has occurred. Consider the consequences of concealment in this situation. By failing to reveal the job offer, the source is preventing the receiver from operating with all the known facts. For example, a decision to remain in a long-distance relationship might be influenced if one partner is unwilling to take a job that would require living in the same state.

The third form of deception is referred to as equivocation. This form of deception represents a moral gray area for some, as they view equivocation as a clear lie. Equivocation is a statement that could be interpreted as having more than one meaning. For example, you ask your romantic partner if she talked to her ex-boyfriend last night, and she says, “no, I didn’t talk to him,” but she did text with him, then an equivocation has occurred. Technically, the statement, “I did not talk to him,” is true, but only technically because communication happened in a different form. Consider how the answer may have been changed if the question was, “Did you communicate with your ex-boyfriend last night?” Now that we have discussed what deception is and several types of deception, we can examine how deception functions in romantic relationships.

Lies in Romantic Relationships

Jennifer Guthrie and Adrienne Kunkel explored the reasons romantic partners engage in deception.⁶⁸ The researchers asked 67 college students to record their deceptive communication in diaries for seven days. At the end of seven days, the students returned their diaries. The researchers counted the deceptive communication acts in all of the diaries and determined that the 67 students produced 327 deceptive acts in a seven-day period. The results of their study showed that 147 of the deceptive acts were lies, 61 were exaggerations, half-truths accounted for 56 of the deceptive acts, 35 of the deceptive acts were diversionary responses, 26 were secrets. Two uses of deception could not be categorized due to a lack of detail in the diary. On average, each participant engaged in 4.88 deceptive acts over a seven-day period.

Besides studying how often participants lied, Guthrie and Kunkel⁶⁹ were interested in why the students lied. The students provided 334 reasons for the 327 deceptive acts that they reported. The researchers were able to categorize the 334 reasons into six overarching motives for lying: engaging in relational maintenance, managing face needs, negotiating dialectical tensions, establishing relational control, continuing previous deception, and an unknown category. Table 14.4 breaks down each motive for deception further.

Table 14.4. Deceptive Acts

Overarching Motives	Individual Motives
Managing Face Needs	Supporting Positive Face
	Supporting own and/or partner's positive face (protecting partner's feelings and self-presentation)
	Supporting Negative Face
	Supporting own and/or partner's negative face (avoiding unwanted activities and/or imposition)
Negotiating Dialectical Tensions	Balancing Autonomy/Connection
	Balancing the need for independence versus the need for togetherness
	Balancing Openness/Closedness
	Balancing the need for open communication versus the need for privacy
	Balancing Novelty/Predictability
	Balancing the need for spontaneity versus the need for routine or expected behaviors
Establishing Relational Control	Acting Coercive
	Ensuring partner behaves or feels how partner wants them to
Continuing Previous Deception	Participants indicated that they had lied about something in the past

Overarching Motives	Individual Motives
	and the particular act of deception was a way of continuing or maintaining the lie
Unknown	Participants reported that they could not identify their motives for using deception

Through this exploration of the frequency of lies and the motives behind them, Guthrie and Kunkel uncovered an important finding: students in the study responded positively to examining their deceptive acts. They also discovered that students held inaccurate perceptions of their use of deception, underreporting or overreporting how often they engaged in deception. The researchers concluded that reflecting upon deception will allow individuals to understand how deception impacts relationships in both positive and negative ways. Awareness seems to be key to managing deception in romantic relationships.

Domestic Violence or Intimate Partner Violence

“Domestic violence is the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner against another. It includes physical violence, sexual violence, threats, and emotional/psychological abuse.”⁷⁰ The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) expands upon this definition and labels domestic violence as “intimate partner violence.”⁷¹ These include sexual violence, stalking, physical violence, and psychological aggression. The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) defines an intimate partner as a romantic or sexual partner and includes spouses, boyfriends, girlfriends, people with whom they dated, were seeing, or “hooked up.”

According to the *NISVS 2015 Data Brief*, one in three were victims of contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner during their lifetime.⁷² One in four (30 million) women and one in ten (12.1 million) men reported intimate partner violence-related impact which includes being fearful, concerned for safety, injury, need for medical care, needed help from law enforcement, missed at least one day of work, missed at least one day of school, any post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, need for housing services, need for victim advocate services, need for legal services and contacting a crisis hotline.

Sexual violence is a specific form of domestic violence that may be experienced by women and men and includes rape, which can consist of being forcibly penetrated (or penetrating) someone else, sexual coercion, and unwanted sexual contact.⁷³

The CDC considers an individual to be a stalking victim if they “experienced multiple stalking tactics or a single stalking tactic multiple times by the same perpetrator and felt very fearful, or believed that they or someone close to them would be harmed or killed as a result of the perpetrator’s behavior.”⁷⁴

The following behaviors are considered to be stalking by the CDC:

- Unwanted phone calls, voice or text messages, hang-ups
- Unwanted emails, instant messages, messages through social media
- Unwanted cards, letters, flowers, or presents
- Watching or following from a distance, spying with a listening device, camera, or global positioning system (GPS)
- Approaching or showing up in places, such as the victim's home, workplace, or school when it was unwanted
- Leaving strange or potentially threatening items for the victim to find
- Sneaking into the victim's home or car and doing things to scare the victim or let the victim know the perpetrator had been there
- In follow-up questions, respondents who were identified as possible stalking victims were asked about their experiences with two additional tactics:
- Damaged personal property or belongings, such as in their home or car
- Made threats of physical harm

Sally Fiona Kelly explored aggression concerning violent sentiments.⁷⁵ In her study, she sought to understand why individuals engaged in violent behavior. Her study demonstrates that individuals who have committed violent acts in a relationship believe violence is acceptable and are prepared to use violence. This finding suggests that one approach to reducing violence is to focus on changing beliefs and thoughts associated with violence. Strategic communication scholars can create campaigns to target beliefs related to violence. In a similar study, participants predicted women would become more aggressive while watching videos of males and females in conflict. When watching videos of “fighting” couples, males predicted the conflict would lead to increasing levels of aggression more often than females. Male participants also recommended the use of more aggressive behaviors during conflict.⁷⁶ Thus, this study underscores the change in perceptions of the acceptability of aggressive behavior. This same study assessed participants' perceptions of the likelihood of conciliatory strategies by the individuals in fights. Participants in the study believe the chance of forgiveness and resolution decreases as conflict increases. Considering this finding, relational partners should apologize and forgive earlier in conflicts to reduce escalation, which may increase the chance of violence.

Being Mindful

Gaining awareness of destructive communication behaviors in relationships can help avoid the emotional consequences of such behaviors, as well as losing a relationship. Individuals engage in information-seeking strategies to gain insight into the current state-of-the-relationship. As discussed earlier in this chapter, one such strategy is secret testing. This strategy ranges from the not-so-secret “direct” secret test to the entrapping “triangle test.” Other secret tests involve endurance, indirect suggestions, public presentation, separation, and third-party testing. Although secret tests may allow relationship partners to understand their relationship through subtle and sometimes overt information seeking, the direct approach seems to be the one that relationship partners use when they wish to maintain the relationship.

Relational aggression is a harmful form of behavior that serves either to withhold friendship or to manipulate another individual's social relationships. This form of behavior is prevalent among females and typically begins in early childhood, continuing into the workplace. The consequences of relational aggression are emotional pain and withdrawal.

Verbal aggression is a communication strategy in which the self-concept is attacked rather than arguing about the issues of a controversial topic. The impact of verbal aggression can be lessened if the communicator used an affirming style of communication. Bullying is similar to verbal aggression and relational aggression. Bullying is a destructive form of communication in which the aggressor targets an individual who is weaker either in strength, size, or ability. The effects of bullying can range from relatively mild (hurt feelings) to devastating (successful suicide attempts).

One cannot wholly escape the possibility of becoming a victim of the darker side of communication. Still, individuals can work to avoid engaging in the behaviors associated with the dark side of communication. To do so, consider adopting an affirming style of communication, focusing on the topic during arguments rather than the self-concept of others, and working to prevent bullying when it is observed in others. Additionally, relational aggression can be avoided by refusing to engage in the behavior and by not participating when others are doing so. In particular, we should not simply accept that relational aggression is a natural occurrence among females. Finally, talk with your partner about their beliefs concerning aggressive behavior and violence to make sure your partner does not believe violence is an acceptable means of dealing with conflict.

Key Takeaways

- Relational aggression is a harmful communication behavior that manipulates social bonds to control or hurt others, often through gossip, exclusion, or social intimidation.
- Women sometimes perceive relational aggression as normal or cathartic, leading to its continuation despite its negative consequences.
- Verbal aggression targets an individual's self-concept rather than addressing the issue at hand, and can have lasting emotional effects on victims.
- Bullying includes physical, relational, and verbal forms and is often repeated and targeted. It can occur in childhood, online, or in professional environments such as the workplace.
- There are several ways individuals can attempt to diffuse and downplay the effects of the dark side of interpersonal communication.
 - People can learn how to communicate anger effectively.
 - People can develop an affirming communicator style.
 - People can learn how to be mindful of their communicative behavior.

Exercises

1. Relational aggression can cause hurt feelings and lowered self-esteem. Design a plan to help a child who may experience or enact relational aggression.
2. Verbal aggression is a negative form of communication in which the self-concept of another is attacked. Describe a situation in which you engaged in verbal aggression. How will you avoid verbal aggression in future interactions? If you are the target of verbal aggression, how will you approach the perpetrator of this behavior?
3. Once you enter the workplace, you may become a manager of people, or you may already manage people. How will you help your colleagues and subordinates avoid bullying? If you discover that bullying has occurred, what will you do to correct the situation?

Key Terms

bullying	presenting the relationship to outsiders
confrontational behaviors	reasons for relational aggression
directness	relational aggression
endurance test	relational bullying
indirect suggestions	secret tests
intimate partner violence	separation test
internet characteristics	third-party testing
internet infidelity	triangle test
nonconfrontational behaviors	types of workplace bullying
physical bullying	verbal bullying

Chapter Wrap-Up

“But beware of the dark side. Anger, fear, aggression...the dark side of the Force are they, easily they flow... If once you start down the dark path, forever will it dominate your destiny. Consume you, it will...” —Yoda

The concept of “the dark side” originates from the struggle between good and evil presented by George Lucas in *Star Wars*, released in 1977. The metaphor of “the dark side” has been employed by communication scholars to examine a range of interpersonal relationship behaviors that are highly problematic and destructive. We began this chapter by reviewing several destructive interpersonal behaviors: secret testing, Internet infidelity, and hurtful messages. We then switched our focus to the highly destructive world of interpersonal aggression. We looked at how interpersonal relationships can be both verbally and physically destructive. If you find yourself in a verbally or physically destructive interpersonal relationship, please seek help. No one deserves to be belittled, demeaned, or assaulted.

Chapter Exercises

Real-World Case Study

Carrie’s daughter, Diana, had only been at Birmingham School Junior High School a few months when she formed a friendship with three girls: Lisa, Lucy, and Kristen. The girls were great friends, and spent a significant amount of time on the phone and at the mall on the weekends. The girls graduated from 8th grade and moved on to high school. During their freshman year, Diana took a disliking to Lisa and began campaigning against her. At some point, Diana decided that the group should no longer include Lisa. When spending the night with Kristen, Diana asked Kristen to call Lisa to get her to talk about her behind her back. She planned to confront Lisa if she talked about her. She plotted with Lucy and Kristen to get them to ignore Lisa when she came to sit with them at lunch. In a final act to eradicate Lisa from the group, she coaxed Lucy into writing a note Kristen to say that she didn’t want to be friends with Lisa anymore. The plan was for Diana to “find” the note and then give it to Lisa so that she could see how Kristen and Lucy felt about her. The girls moved forward with their plan to write the note and give it to Lisa. After Lisa received the note, she went to Kristen to find out what was going on. She was devastated and crying. Kristen felt terrible for her, but she didn’t betray her friendship with Diana. Later, Lisa’s mom called Carrie to talk about the situation and determine what could be done.

1. What term describes the behavior demonstrated by the girls in the scenario?
2. Is it reasonable to expect Kristen and Lucy to stand up to Diana?
3. What, in your opinion, caused Diana to exclude Lisa?
4. When Carrie found out about her daughter’s behavior, what was her responsibility?
5. Was it acceptable for Lisa’s mom to call Carrie?
6. What would you do in this situation?

End-of-Chapter Assessment

1. Which form of secret test involves physical distance?
 - a. endurance

- b. separation
 - c. third party
 - d. public presentation
 - e. triangle test
- 2. Verbal aggression is defined as
 - a. attacking the self-concept of others
 - b. attacking the topic in an argument
 - c. manipulating social relationships of others
 - d. using one's power to intimidate others
 - e. isolating the target of communication
- 3. Relational aggression is best defined as
 - a. manipulating the social relationships of others
 - b. attacking the self-concept of others
 - c. attacking the topic in an argument
 - d. using one's power to intimidate others
 - e. isolating the target
- 4. Which of the following is not a form of workplace bullying?
 - a. Damaging professional standing
 - b. Limiting the ability to complete work
 - c. Obstructing due process
 - d. Verbal threats
 - e. Providing counseling through human resources upon reports of bullying
- 5. Which of the following is not included in playful teasing?
 - a. Parties are Friends
 - b. Repeated occurrences of the same behavior
 - c. Signs of affection
 - d. Parties smile and laugh
 - e. Parties are using teasing to broach difficult topics

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GLOSSARY

"you" statements

Moralistic judgments where we imply the wrongness or badness of another person and the way they have behaved.

abstract

Refers to words that relate to ideas or concepts that exist only in your mind and do not represent a tangible object.

abstraction ladder

A diagram that explains the process of abstraction.

accent

Nonverbal communication that emphasizes a portion of a message or word rather than the message as a whole.

accidental communication

When an individual sends messages to another person without realizing those messages are being sent.

acting with awareness

Purposefully focusing one's attention on the activity or interaction in which one is engaged.

action model

Communication model that views communication as a one-directional transmission of information from a source or sender to some destination or receiver.

active friendships

Type of stabilized friendship where there is a negotiated sense of mutual accessibility and availability for both parties in the friendship.

affect

"Any experience of feeling or emotion, ranging from suffering to elation, from the simplest to the most complex sensations of feeling, and from the most normal to the most pathological emotional reactions. Often described in terms of positive affect or negative affect, both mood and emotion are considered affective states."

affect displays

Kinesics that show feelings and emotions.

affectionless psychopathy

The inability to show affection or care about others.

affective orientation

An individual's recognition of their own emotions and the emotions of others and reliance on these emotions during decision making processes.

affiliation

A connection or association with others.

agape

Selfless love in which the needs of others are the priority.

agentic friendships

Friendships marked by activity.

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.

ambiguous language

Language that has multiple meanings.

analyzing

This is helpful in gaining different alternatives and perspectives by offering an interpretation of the speaker's message.

androgynous

A person having both feminine and masculine characteristics.

anonymous CMC identity

People in CMC interactions can communicate in a manner where their actual identity is simply not known.

anxious shyness

The fear associated with dealing with others face-to-face.

appreciative listening

The type of listening you engage in for pleasure or enjoyment.

appropriate communication

Communication tactics that most people would consider acceptable communicative behaviors.

argument

A verbal exchange between two or more people who have differing opinions on a given subject or subjects.

argumentativeness

Communication trait that predisposes the individual in communication situations to advocate positions on controversial issues, and to attack

verbally the positions which other people take on these issues.

ARPANET

The U.S. Department of Defense's Advanced Research Projects Agency Network, which was the precursor to what is now known as the Internet.

Artifacts

Items we adorn our bodies or which we carry with us.

assertiveness

The degree to which an individual can initiate, maintain, and terminate conversations, according to their interpersonal goals during interpersonal interactions.

asynchronous communication

A mediated form of communication in which the sender and receiver are not concurrently engaged in communication.

attending

The act of focusing on specific objects or stimuli in the world around you

attention

Factor of mindful practice that involves being aware of what's happening internally and externally moment-to-moment.

attitude

Factor of mindful practice that involves being curious, open, and nonjudgmental.

attraction

Interest in another person and a desire to get to know them better.

attribution

individuals will attribute success to either their own abilities (I am skilled.) or external environments (I got lucky; It was my day.).

attribution error

The tendency to explain another individual's behavior in relation to the individual's internal tendencies rather than an external factor.

authoritarianism

A form of social organization where individuals favor absolute obedience to an authority (or authorities) as opposed to individual freedom.

autonomy

An individual's independence in their behaviors and thoughts within a marriage relationship.

Availability Maintenance

Lies about when an individual is available or why the individual appeared to "disappear" for a while such as "my phone died."

avoidance

Conflict management style where an individual attempt to either prevent a conflict from occurring or leaves a conflict when initiated.

avoiding

The stage of coming apart where you are creating distance from your partner.

Behavioral CQ

The degree to which an individual behaves in a manner that is consistent with what they know about other cultures.

belief

Assumptions and convictions held by an individual, group, or culture about the truth or existence of something.

bias

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.

biased language

Language that shows preference in favor of or against a certain point-of-view, shows prejudice, or is demeaning to others.

bonding

The stage of coming together where you make a public announcement that your relationship exists.

bullying

Form of aggressive behavior in which a person of greater power attempts to inflict harm or discomfort on individuals and the behavior is repeated over time.

buzz word

Informal word or jargon used among a particular group of people.

career strategizing

The process of creating a plan of action for one's career path and trajectory.

catfishing

Deceptive activity perpetrated by Internet predators where they fabricate online identities on social networking sites to lure unsuspecting

victims into an emotional/romantic relationship.

channel

The pathways in which messages are conveyed.

Chronemics

The use of time to communicate.

circumscribing

The stage of coming apart where communication decreases. There are more arguments, working late, and there is less intimacy.

cliché

Expression that has been so overused that it has lost its original meaning.

co-culture

Regional, economic, social, religious, ethnic, or other cultural groups that exerts influence in society.

co-present interactions

When people are physically occupying the same space while interacting with one another.

coercive power

The ability to punish an individual who does not comply with one's influencing attempts.

cognitive complexity

The psychological characteristic that indicates the difficulty or simplicity associated with mental demand.

Cognitive CQ

The degree to which an individual has cultural knowledge.

cognitive dispositions

General patterns of mental processes that impact how people respond and react to the world around them.

collective self-esteem

The aspect of an individual's self-worth or self-image that stems from their interaction with others and evaluation of their various social groups.

collectivism

Characteristics of a culture that values cooperation and harmony and considers the needs of the group to be more important than the needs of the individual.

collegial peers

Type of coworker with whom we have moderate levels of trust, self-disclosure, and openness.

colloquialism

Informal expression used in casual conversation that is often specific to certain dialects or geographic regions of a country.

commemorative friendships

Type of stabilized friendship that reflects a specific space and time in our lives, but current interaction is minimal and primarily reflects a time when the two friends were highly involved in each other's lives.

communal friendships

Friendships marked by intimacy, personal/emotional expressiveness, amount of self-disclosure, quality of self-disclosure, confiding, and emotional supportiveness.

communication

The process by which we share ideas or information with other people.

communication apprehension

The fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons.

communication competence

Communication that is both socially appropriate and personally effective.

communication dispositions

General patterns of communicative behavior.

communication motives

Reasons why we communicate with others.

communication needs

Shows us how communication fulfills our needs.

comparison level

Minimum standard of what is acceptable.

comparison level of alternatives

Comparison of what is happening in the relationship and what could be gained in another relationship.

Compassion

The sympathetic consciousness for someone who is suffering or unfortunate

compatible

Able to exist together harmoniously.

complement

Nonverbal communication that reinforces verbal communication.

complementary

When one person can fulfill the other person's needs.

compliance

When an individual accepts an influencer's influence and alters their thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors.

comprehension listening

Listening for facts, information, or ideas that may be of use to you.

concept-orientation

Family communication pattern where freedom of expression is encouraged, and communication is frequent and family life is pleasurable.

conflict

An interactive process occurring when conscious beings (individuals or groups) have opposing or incompatible actions, beliefs, goals, ideas, motives, needs, objectives, obligations, resources, and/or values.

confrontational behaviors

Specific behaviors associated with confrontation or direct behaviors, involves name-calling, cruel teasing, ridicule, and verbal rejection directed at the target.

connotation

What a word suggests or implies; connotations give words their emotional impact.

connotative definitions

The emotions or associations a person makes when exposed to a symbol.

contact frequency

This is how often you communicate with another person.

content level

Information that is communicated through the denotative and literal meanings of words.

contextual dialectics

Friendship dialectics that stem out of the cultural order where the friendship exists.

contradict

Nonverbal communication conveying the opposite meaning of verbal communication.

converge

Adapting your communication style to the speaker to be similar.

conversations

Interpersonal interactions through which you share facts and information as well as your ideas, thoughts, and feelings with other people.

cost escalations

A form of relational disengagement involving tactics designed to make the cost of maintaining the relationship higher than getting out of the relationship.

critical listening

To analyze what the person is saying based on known facts and evidence.

cross-group friendship

Friendship that exists between two individuals who belong to two or more different cultural groups (e.g., ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, nationality, etc.).

cultural intelligence

The degree to which an individual can communicate competently in varying cultural situations.

culture

A group of people who, through a process of learning, can share perceptions of the world, which influence their beliefs, values, norms, and rules, which eventually affect behavior.

culture as normative

The basic idea that one's culture provides the rules, regulations, and norms that govern a culture and how people act with other members of that society.

cyberbullying

Intentional harm inflicted through the medium of electronics that is repeated over time.

denotation

The dictionary definition or descriptive meaning of a word.

denotative definitions

Definitions for words commonly found in dictionaries.

depersonalization

A form of relational disengagement where an individual stops all the interaction that is not task-focused or simply avoids the person.

depression

A psychological disorder characterized by varying degrees of disappointment, guilt, hopelessness, loneliness, sadness, self-doubt, all of which negatively impact a person's general mental and physical wellbeing.

describing

Being detailed focused on what is occurring while putting it into words.

deviant workplace behavior

The voluntary behavior of organizational members that violates significant organizational norms and practices or threatens the wellbeing of the organization and its members.

dialectical tension

How individuals deal with struggles in their relationship.

differentiating

The stage of coming apart where both people are trying to figure out their own identities.

directive support

The factor of Hersey and Blanchard's situational-leadership model that involves a leader overseeing the day-to-day tasks that a follower accomplishes.

directness

The least secretive of the strategies and involves asking the relational partner about his/her feelings toward the relationship and commitment to the relationship. Alternatively, an individual might disclose their feelings about the relationship with the hope that the relationship partner will reciprocate.

disagreement

A difference of opinion between two or more people or groups of people.

discourse

Spoken or written discussion of a subject.

Discovery Phase

The phase in an online dating app between swiping right and meeting.

dismissing attachment

Attachment style posed by Kim Bartholomew and Leonard Horowitz describing individuals who see themselves as worthy of love, but generally believe that others will be deceptive and reject them in interpersonal relationships.

distributive conflict

A win-lose approach, whereby conflicting parties see their job as to win and make sure the other person or group loses.

diverge

Adapting your communication style to the speaker to be drastically different.

dogmatism

The inclination to believe one's point-of-view as undeniably true based on insufficient premises and without consideration of evidence and the opinions of others.

dominant culture

The established language, religion, behavior, values, rituals, and social customs of a society.

dormant friendships

Type of stabilized friendship that "share either a valued history or a sufficient amount of sustained contact to anticipate or remain eligible for a resumption of the friendship at any time."

Dunning-Kruger effect

The tendency of some people to inflate their expertise when they really have nothing to back up that perception.

duration

The length of time of your relationship.

dysfluencies

Speech problems that keep your speech from being as smooth and flowing as it could be.

ease of opportunity

When romantic workplace relationships happen because work fosters an environment where people are close to one another.

effective communication

Communication that helps an individual achieve a desired personal outcome.

emblems

Kinesics that are clear and unambiguous and have a verbal equivalent in a given culture.

emoticon

A series of characters and/or letters designed to help readers interpret a writer's intended feelings and/or tone.

emotional awareness

An individual's ability to clearly express, in words, what they are feeling and why.

emotional blackmail

Trying to influence someone's behavior or persuade them to do something by making them feel guilty or exploiting their emotions.

emotional intelligence

An individual's appraisal and expression of their emotions and the emotions of others in a manner that enhances thought, living, and communicative interactions.

emotional loneliness

Form of loneliness that occurs when an individual feels that he or she does not have an emotional connection with others.

emotional vampires

A colloquial term used to describe individuals with whom we interact that use more of our emotional resources when interacting with people, which often causes an increase in our levels of stress.

emotions

The physical reactions to stimuli in the outside environment.

empathic listening

Attempting to put yourself in another person's shoes or to provide a supportive listening environment.

empathizing

This is used to show that you identify with the speaker's information.

empathy

The ability to recognize and mutually experience another person's attitudes, emotions, experiences, and thoughts.

endurance test

Form of secret testing in which the partner is tested by engaging in actions that the partner might perceive to be a cost in the relationship.

environment

The context or situation in which communication occurs.

eros

Romantic love involving serial monogamous relationships.

ethics

The judgmental attachment to whether something is good, right, or just.

ethnocentrism

The degree to which an individual views the world from their own culture's perspective while evaluating different cultures according to their own culture's preconceptions often accompanied by feelings of dislike, mistrust, or hate for cultures deemed inferior.

euphemism

Replacing blunt words with more polite words.

evaluative listening

Listening for a speaker's main points and determining the strengths and weaknesses to formulate a rebuttal or present important points that may not have been covered.

excuse-making

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.

experimenting

The stage of coming together "Small talk" occurs at this stage and you are searching for commonalities.

expert power

The ability of an individual to influence another because of their level of perceived knowledge or skill.

expressive

Roles that are relationship-oriented.

expressive communication

Messages that are sent either verbally or non-verbally related to an individual's emotions and feelings.

external locus of control

The belief that an individual's behavior and circumstances exist because of forces outside the individual's control.

extraversion

An individual's likelihood to be talkative, dynamic, and outgoing.

eye gaze

The act of fixing your eyes on someone.

face

The standing or position a person has in the eyes of others.

family

Two or more people tied by marriage, blood, adoption, or choice; living together or apart by choice or circumstance; having interaction within family roles; creating and maintaining a common culture; being characterized by economic cooperation; deciding to have or not to have children, either own or adopted; having boundaries; and claiming mutual affection.

fearful attachment

Attachment style posed by Kim Bartholomew and Leonard Horowitz describing individuals who see themselves as unworthy of love and generally believe that others will react negatively through either deception or rejection.

feedback

Information shared back to the source of communication that keeps the communication moving forward and thus making communication a process.

feelings

The responses to thoughts and interpretations given to emotions based on experiences, memory, expectations, and personality.

feminine

Cultures focused on having a good working relationship with one's manager and coworkers, cooperating with people at work, and security (both job and familial).

followership

The act or condition under which an individual helps or supports a leader in the accomplishment of organizational goals.

formal language

Specific writing and spoken style that adheres to strict conventions of grammar that uses complex sentences, full words, and third-person pronouns.

gender

The psychological characteristics that determine if a person is feminine or masculine.

genogram

A pictorial representation of a family across generations that can be used to track generations of family interactions, medical issues, psychological issues, relationship patterns, and any other variable a researcher or clinician may be interested in studying.

gig economy

an economic model where individuals work various jobs or complete various task according to their expertise or preference.

goals

Expectations about how the relationship will function.

group

Three or more people interacting together to achieve a common goal.

haptics

The study of touch as a form of communication.

hearing

A passive activity where an individual perceives sound by detecting vibrations through an ear.

hedge

To use words or phrases that weaken the certainty of a statement.

heuristic function

The use of language to explore and investigate the world, solve problems, and learn from your discoveries and experiences.

high-context cultures

Cultures that interpret meaning by relying more on nonverbal context or behavior than on verbal symbols in communication.

hyperpersonal

CMC interactions that exceed those possible of traditional FtF interactions.

ideal-self

The version of yourself that you would like to be, which is created through our life experiences, cultural demands, and expectations of others.

identification

When an individual accepts influence because they want to have a satisfying relationship with the influencer or influencing group.

ideology of traditionalism

Marriages that are marked by a more historically traditional, conservative perspective of marriage.

idiom

Expression or figure of speech whose meaning cannot be understood by looking at the individual words and interpreting them literally.

illustrators

Kinesics that emphasize or explain a word.

imaginative function

The use of language to play with ideas that do not exist in the real-world.

immediacy

physical and psychological closeness

importance to identity

The degree to which group membership is important to an individual.

impression formation

How we present ourselves to others through our online persona.

impression management

"The attempt to generate as favorable an impression of ourselves as possible, particularly through both verbal and nonverbal techniques of self-presentation."

independents

Marital definition where couples have a high level of interdependence, an unconventional ideology, and high levels of conflict engagement.

indigenous peoples

Populations that originated in a particular place rather than moved there.

indirect suggestions

Joking or hinting about more serious stages of a relationships such as marriage or having children.

individualism

Characteristics of a culture that values being self-reliant and self-motivated, believes in personal freedom and privacy, and celebrates personal achievement.

individuality

Aspect of Murray Bowen's family system theory that emphasizes that there is a universal, biological life force that propels organisms toward separateness, uniqueness, and distinctiveness.

indulgence

Cultural orientation marked by immediate gratification for individual desires.

inflection

Changes in vocal pitch.

influence

When an individual or group of people alters another person's thinking, feelings, and/or behaviors through accidental, expressive, or rhetorical communication.

informal language

Specific writing and spoken style that is more colloquial or common in tone; contains simple, direct sentences; uses contractions and abbreviations; and allows for a more personal approach that includes emotional displays.

information peers

Type of coworker who we rely on for information about job tasks and the organization itself.

informational power

A social agent's ability to bring about a change in thought, feeling, and/or behavior through information.

initiating

The stage of coming together where a person is interested in making contact and it is brief.

instrumental

Roles that are focused on being task-oriented.

instrumental function

The use of language as a means for meeting your needs, manipulating and controlling your environment, and expressing your feelings.

integrating

This is the stage of coming together where you take on an identity as a social unit or give up characteristics of your old self.

integrative conflict

A win-win approach to conflict, whereby both parties attempt to come to a settled agreement that is mutually beneficial.

intensifying

The stage of coming together where two people truly become a couple.

intensity

The volume of your speech; how loudly or softly you express yourself.

intention

Factor of mindful practice that involves being aware of why you are doing something.

interaction model

Communication model that views the sender and the receiver as responsible for the effectiveness of the communication.

interaction variability

The ability to talk about various topics.

interactional dialectics

Friendship dialectics that help us understand how communicative behavior happens within friendships

interactional function

The use of language to help you form and maintain relationships.

interdependence

When individuals involved in a relationship characterize it as continuous and important.

interdependent

A relationship in which people need each other or depend on each other in some way, and the actions of one person affect the other.

internal locus of control

The belief that an individual can control their behavior and life circumstances.

internalization

When an individual adopts influence and alters their thinking, feeling, and/or behaviors because doing so is intrinsically rewarding.

internet characteristics

Internet characteristic that influence Internet relationships such as speed, reach, interactivity, and anonymity.

internet infidelity

Sexual energy of any sort—thoughts, feelings, and behaviors—outside of a committed sexual relationship in such a way that it damages the relationship, and pretending that this drain in energy will affect neither one's partner nor the relationship as long as it remains undiscovered.

interpersonal communication

The exchange of messages between two people.

interpreting

Interpretation is the act of assigning meaning to a stimulus and then determining the worth of the object (evaluation).

intimacy

Close and deeply personal contact with another person.

intimate partner violence

Includes physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, and psychological aggression.

intrapersonal

Something that exists or occurs within an individual's self or mind.

intrapersonal communication

Communication phenomena that exist within or occurs because of an individual's self or mind.

introversion

An individual's likelihood to be quiet, shy, and more reserved

jargon

The specialized or technical language particular to a specific profession, occupation, or group that is either meaningless or difficult for outsiders to understand.

Johari Window

A model that illustrates self-disclosure and the process by which you interact with other people.

kinesics

The study of visible means of communicating using body language such as eye behavior, facial expression, body posture and movement, and hand gestures.

language

A system of human communication using a particular form of spoken or written words or other symbols.

language adaptation

The ability to alter one's linguistic choices in a communicatively competent manner

language awareness

a person's ability to be mindful and sensitive to all functions and forms of language.

launching stage

Period in a family life cycle when late adolescents leave the parental home and venture out into the world as young singles themselves.

leader-member exchange

Theory of leadership that explores how leaders enter into two-way relationships with followers through a series of exchange agreements enabling followers to grow or be held back.

legitimate power

Influence that occurs because a person (P) believes that the social agent (A) has a valid right (generally based on cultural or hierarchical standing) to influence P, and P has an obligation to accept A's attempt to influence P's thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors.

linguistic determinism

The perspective that language influences thoughts.

linguistic relativity

The view that language contains special characteristics.

listening

A complex psychological process that can be defined as the process of physically hearing, interpreting that sound, and understanding the significance of it.

locus of control

An individual's perceived control over their behavior and life circumstances.

loneliness

An individual's emotional distress that results from a feeling of solitude or isolation from social relationships.

long-term orientation

Cultural orientation where individuals focus on the future and not the present or past.

love

Love is a multidimensional concept that can include several different orientations toward the loved person such as romantic love (attraction based on physical beauty or handsomeness), best friend love, passionate love, unrequited love (love that is not returned), and compan-

ionate love (affectionate love and tenderness between people).

love style

Love style is considered an attitude that influences an individual's perception of love.

low-context cultures

Cultures that interpret meaning by placing a great deal of emphasis on the words someone uses.

ludus

Love in which games are played. Lying and deceit are acceptable.

Machiavellianism

Personality trait posed by Richard Christie where cunningness and deceit are exalted as a means of attaining and maintaining power to accomplish specific, self-centered goals.

mania

Obsessive love that requires constant reassurance.

masculine

Cultures focused on items like earnings, recognition, advancement, and challenge.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Theory of motivation proposed by Abraham Maslow comprising a five-tier, hierarchical pyramid of needs: physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization.

Maternal Deprivation Hypothesis

Hypothesis posed by John Bowlby that predicts that infants who are denied maternal attachment will experience problematic outcomes later in life.

mediated communication

The use of some form of technology to facilitate information between two or more people.

membership esteem

The degree to which an individual sees themselves as a “good” member of a group.

message/bulletin boards

Online discussion sites where people can hold conversations in the form of posted messages.

metacognitive CQ

The degree to which an individual is consciously aware of their intercultural interactions in a manner that helps them have more effective interpersonal experiences with people from differing cultures.

metamessage

The meaning beyond the words themselves.

microculture

Cultural patterns of behavior influenced by cultural beliefs, values, norms, and rules based on a specific locality or within an organization.

mindful awareness

To be consciously aware of your physical presence, cognitive processes, and emotional state while engaged in an activity.

mindful communication

The process of interacting with others while engaging in mindful awareness and practice

mindful practice

The conscious development of skills such as greater ability to direct and sustain our attention, less reactivity, greater discernment and

compassion, and enhanced capacity to disidentify from one’s concept of self.

model

A simplified representation of a system (often graphic) that highlights the important components and connections of concepts, which are used to help people understand an aspect of the real-world.

motivational CQ

The degree to which an individual desires to engage in intercultural interactions and can easily adapt to differing cultural environments.

narcissism

A psychological condition (or personality disorder) in which a person has a preoccupation with one’s self.

netiquette

The set of professional and social rules and norms that are considered acceptable and polite when interacting with another person(s) through mediated technologies.

noise

Anything that can interfere with the message being sent or received.

nonconfrontational behaviors

Behaviors include spreading rumors, gossiping, and social manipulation.

nonjudging of inner experience

Being consciously aware of one’s thoughts, feelings, and attitudes without judging them.

nonreactivity to inner experience

Taking a step back and evaluating things from a more logical, dispassionate perspective.

nonverbal vocalization

A type of paralanguage that consists of sounds, noises, and behaviors that are often accompanied by body language.

norms

Informal guidelines about what is acceptable or proper social behavior within a specific culture.

observing

Being aware of what is going on inside yourself and in the external environment.

oculesics

Communication involving eye behavior such as eye contact, gaze, and avoidance.

olfactics

The use of scent to communicate.

organizing

Organizing is making sense of the stimuli or assigning meaning to it.

ostracized

Excluded or removed from a group by others in that group.

paralanguage

Voice characteristics and nonverbal vocalizations that communicate feelings, intentions, and meanings.

paraphrase

To restate what another person said using different words.

perception

The process of acquiring, interpreting, and organizing information that comes in through your five senses.

personal function

The use of language to help you form your identity or sense of self.

personal responsibility

An individual's willingness to be accountable for how they feel, think, and behave.

personality

The combination of traits or qualities such as behavior, emotional stability, and mental attributes that make a person unique.

physical attraction

The degree to which one person finds another person aesthetically pleasing.

physical bullying

Involves hitting, kicking, pulling hair, strapping a female's bra strap or giving a "wedgie."

pitch

The placement of your voice on the musical scale; the basis on which singing voices are classified as soprano, alto, tenor, baritone, or bass voices.

platonic

A close relationship that is not physical.

postmodern friendship

Friendship where the "participants co-construct the individual and dyadic realities within specific friendships. This co-construction involves negotiating and affirming (or not) identities and intersubjectively creating relational and personal realities through communication."

power

The degree that a social agent (A) has the ability to get another person(s) (P) to alter their thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors.

power distance

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.

pragma

Love involving logic and reason.

preoccupied attachment

Attachment style posed by Kim Bartholomew and Leonard Horowitz describing individuals who do not perceive themselves as worthy of love, but do generally see people as trustworthy and available for interpersonal relationships.

presenting the relationship to outsiders

Form of secret testing in which the partner publicly declares their relationship status to gauge a partner's response.

private collective esteem

The degree to which an individual positively evaluates their group.

procedural disagreements

Disagreements concerned with procedure, how a decision should be reached or how a policy should be implemented.

profession

An occupation that involves mastery of complex knowledge and skills through prolonged training, education, or practical experience.

professionalism

The aims and behaviors that demonstrate an individual's level of competence expected by a professional within a given profession.

proxemics

The use of space to communicate.

pseudonymity CMC identity

Identity that someone takes on that is beyond themselves in the creation of CMC messages.

public collective self-esteem

The degree to which nonmembers of a group evaluate a group and its members either positively or negatively.

public communication

Form of communication where an individual or group of individuals sends a specific message to an audience.

racism

Bias against others on the basis of their race or ethnicity.

racist language

Language that demeans or insults people based on their race or ethnicity.

real-life CMC identity

When our CMC identity and our FtF identities are congruent.

reasons for relational aggression

Women's explanations for relational aggression: (a) girls will be girls; (b) venting; (c) blaming the victim; (d) minimizing their role; and (e) regret

receiver

The receiver decodes the message in an environment that includes noise.

referent power

A social agent's (A) ability to influence another person (P) because P wants to be associated with A.

regulate

Nonverbal communication which controls the flow of conversation.

regulators

Kinesics that help coordinate the flow of conversation.

regulatory function

The use of language to control behavior.

rejection sensitivity

The degree to which an individual expects to be rejected, readily perceives rejection when occurring, and experiences an intensely negative reaction to that rejection.

relational aggression

Behaviors that harm others. Harm is created through damaging social relationship or feelings of acceptance.

relational bullying

The manipulation of social relationships to inflict hurt upon another individual.

relational dispositions

General patterns of mental processes that impact how people view and organize themselves in relationships.

Relational Load

wear and tear on emotional, relational, and cognitive resources in relationships created by chronic stress and conflict.

relational maintenance

Degree of difficulty individuals experience in interpersonal relationships due to misunderstandings, incompatibility of goals, and the time and effort necessary to cope with disagreements.

relationship

A connection, association, or attachment that people have with each other.

relationship dialectic

Tensions in a relationship where individuals need to deal with integration vs. separation, expression vs. privacy, and stability vs. change.

relationship level

The type of relationship between people as evidenced through their communication.

relationship maintenance

Strategies to help your relationship be successful and satisfying.

relative language

Language that gains understanding by comparison.

repeat

Nonverbal communication that repeats verbal communication, but could stand alone.

representational function

The use of language to represent objects and ideas and to express your thoughts.

responsiveness

The degree to which an individual considers other's feelings, listens to what others have to say, and recognizes the needs of others during interpersonal interactions.

restraint

Cultural orientation marked by the belief that gratification should not be instantaneous and should be regulated by cultural rules and norms.

reward power

The ability to offer an individual rewards for complying with one's influencing attempts.

rhetorical communication

Purposefully creating and sending messages to another person in the hopes of altering another person's thinking, feelings, and/or behaviors.

rhythm

Variation in the flow of your voice created by differences in the pitch, intensity, tempo, and length of word syllables.

richness

The potential information carrying capacity of data.

right-wing authoritarians

Individuals who believe in submitting themselves to established, legitimate authorities; strict adherence to social and cultural norms; and the need to punish those who do not submit to authorities or who violate social and cultural norms.

romantic relationships

Romantic relationships involve a bond of affection with a specific partner that researchers believe involves several psychological features: a

desire for emotional closeness and union with the partner, caregiving, emotional dependency on the relationship and the partner, a separation anxiety when the other person is not there, and a willingness to sacrifice for the other love.

romantic workplace relationship

When two employees have acknowledged their mutual attraction to one another and have physically acted upon their romantic feelings in the form of a dating or otherwise intimate association.

rules

Explicit guidelines (generally written down) that govern acceptable or proper social behavior within a specific culture.

Sapir-Whorf hypothesis

A theory that suggests that language impacts perceptions. Language is ascertained by the perceived reality of a culture.

secret tests

Indirect strategies individuals use to assess the state of their relationship.

secure attachment

Attachment style posed by Kim Bartholomew and Leonard Horowitz describing individuals who believe that they are loveable and expect that others will generally behave in accepting and responsive ways within interpersonal interactions.

Self-Compassion

Being touched by the suffering of others, opening one's awareness to others' pain and not avoiding or disconnecting from it, so that feelings of kindness toward others and the desire to alleviate their suffering emerge.

Self-compassion

Being touched by and open to one's own suffering, not avoiding or disconnecting from it, generating the desire to alleviate one's suffering and to heal oneself with kindness. Self-compassion also involves offering nonjudgmental understanding to one's pain, inadequacies and failures, so that one's experience is seen as part of the larger human experience.

self-concept

An individual's relatively stable mental picture of him or herself.

self-conscious shyness

Feeling conspicuous or socially exposed when dealing with others face-to-face.

self-disclosure

The process of sharing information with another person.

self-esteem

An individual's subjective evaluation of their abilities and limitations.

self-image

The view an individual has of themselves.

self-monitoring

The theory that individuals differ in the degree to which they can control their behaviors in accordance with the appropriate social rules and norms involved in interpersonal interaction.

self-worth

The degree to which you see yourself as a good person who deserves to be valued and respected.

separates

Marital definition where couples have low interdependence, conventional ideology, and low levels of conflict engagement.

separation test

Creating physical distance to test the strength of the relationship.

sex

The biological characteristics that determine a person as male or female.

sexism

Bias of others based on their biological sex.

sexist language

Language that excludes individuals on the basis of gender or shows a bias toward or against people due to their gender.

sharing

The process of revealing and disclosing information about yourself with another.

short messaging service (SMS)

Communication technology allowing for the exchange of short alphanumeric messages between digital and mobile devices found in phones, the Web, or in mobile communication systems (commonly referred to as "text messaging").

short-term orientation

Cultural orientation where individuals focus on the past or present and not in the future.

shyness

Discomfort when an individual is interacting with another person(s) in a social situation.

sibling hostility

Characteristic of sibling relationships where sibling behaviors as causing trouble, getting into fights, teasing/name-calling, taking things without permission, etc.

sibling warmth

Characteristic of sibling relationships where sibling behaviors such as sharing secrets, helping each other, teaching each other, showing physical affection, sharing possessions, etc.

side hustle

an extra job performed in addition to a person's main job

silent listening

This occurs when you say nothing and is appropriate for certain situations.

similarity

When romantic workplace relationships occur because people find coworkers have similar personalities, interests, backgrounds, desires, needs, goals, etc....

slang

The nonstandard language of a particular culture or subculture.

social attraction

The degree to which an individual sees another person as entertaining, intriguing, and fun to be around.

social loneliness

Form of loneliness that occurs from a lack of a satisfying social network.

social penetration theory

Theory originally created by Altman and Taylor to explain how individuals gradually become more intimate as individuals self-disclose more and those self-disclosures become more intimate (deep).

social presence

The degree to which we, as individuals, perceive another as a real person and any interaction between the two of us as a relationship.

social support

The perception and actuality that an individual receives assistance, care, and help from those people within their life.

social-personal dispositions

General patterns of mental processes that impact how people socially relate to others or view themselves.

socio-orientation

Family communication pattern where similarity is valued over individuality and self-expression, and harmony is preferred over expression of opinion.

sociocommunicative orientation

The degree to which an individual communicates using responsive or assertive communication techniques.

source

The person initiating communication and encoding the message and selecting the channel.

special peer

Type of coworker relationship marked by high levels of trust and self-disclosure; like a “best friend” in the workplace.

spin

The manipulation of language to achieve the most positive interpretation of words, to gain political advantage, or to deceive others.

stagnating

The stage of coming apart where you are behaving in old familiar ways without much feeling. In other words, there is lost enthusiasm for old familiar things.

state-of-the-relationship talk

A form of relational disengagement where an individual explains to a coworker that a workplace friendship is ending.

static evaluation

Language shows that people and things change.

stereotype

A set of beliefs about the personal attributes of a social group.

storge

Love that develops slowly out of friendship.

substantive disagreement

A disagreement that people have about a specific topic or issue.

substitute

Nonverbal communication that has a direct verbal translation.

support

The ability to provide assistance, aid, or comfort to another.

supportive leadership behavior

The factor of Hersey and Blanchard's situational-leadership model that occurs when a

leader is focused on providing relational support for their followers

symbol

A mark, object, or sign that represents something else by association, resemblance, or convention

symmetrical relationship

A relationship between people who see themselves as equals.

synchronous

A mediated form of communication in which the sender and receiver are concurrently engaged in communication.

system

Sets of elements standing in interrelation.

task attraction

The degree to which an individual is attracted to another person because they possess specific knowledge and/or skills that help that individual accomplish specific goals.

temperament

The genetic predisposition that causes an individual to behave, react, and think in a specific manner.

tempo

The rate of your speech; how slowly or quickly you talk.

temporal regularity

The degree to which a couple sticks to a consistent schedule in their day-to-day lives.

terminating

This is a summary of where the relationship has gone wrong and a desire to quit. It usually

depends on: problems (sudden/gradual); negotiations to end (short/long); the outcome (end/continue in another form).

the hookup

When romantic workplace relationships occur because individuals want to engage in casual sex without any romantic entanglements.

third-culture

When a couple negotiates their cultural background with the cultural background of their partner essentially creating a third-culture or hybrid culture between the two.

third-party testing

Involving a third party such as friend or family to gain insight into the relationship.

timbre

(pronounced “TAM-ber”) The overall quality and tone, which is often called the “color” of your voice; the primary vocal quality that makes your voice either pleasant or disturbing to listen to.

time

When romantic workplace relationships occur because people put in a great deal of time at work, so they are around and interact with potential romantic partners a great deal of the average workday.

togetherness

Aspect of Murray Bowen’s family system theory that emphasizes the complementary, universal, biological life force that propels organisms toward relationship, attachment, and connectedness.

tolerance for disagreement

The degree to which an individual can openly discuss differing opinions without feeling personally attacked or confronted.

traditionals

Marital definition where couples are highly interdependent, conventional ideology, and high levels of conflict engagement

transactional model

Communication model that demonstrate that individuals are often acting as both the sender and receiver simultaneously.

triangle test

Manipulating a third party to gain information about the nature of the relationship.

types of workplace bullying

Workplace bullying involves isolation and exclusion, intimidation and threats, verbal threats, damaging professional identity, limiting career opportunities, obstructing work or making work-life difficult, and denial of due process and natural justice.

uncertainty avoidance

The extent to which cultures as a whole are fearful of ambiguous and unknown situations.

uncertainty reduction theory

The tendency of human beings to eliminate unknown elements of individuals whom they have just met. Individuals wish to predict what another person thinks and how another person behaves. Strategies for reducing uncertainty include passive, active, and interactive.

undifferentiated

A person who does not possess either masculine or feminine characteristics.

undifferentiated space

The degree to which spouses do not see her/his/their ownership of personal belongings as much as they do ownership as a couple.

uses and gratifications theory

Theoretical explanation for why people use the types of mass media they do.

values

Important and lasting principles or standards held by a culture about desirable and appropriate courses of action or outcomes.

verbal aggression

The tendency to attack the self-concept of individuals instead of, or in addition to, their positions on topics of communication.

verbal bullying

Includes threats, degrading comments, teasing, name-calling, putdown or sarcastic comments

verbal surrogates

The sounds humans make as they attempt to fill dead air while they are thinking of what to say next (e.g., uhh, umm).

versatility

The degree to which an individual can utilize both responsiveness and assertiveness that is appropriate and effective during various com-

munication contexts and interpersonal interactions.

vocabulary

All the words understood by a person or group of people.

vocalics

Vocal utterances, other than words, that serve as a form of communication.

willingness to communicate

An individual's tendency to initiate communicative interactions with other people.

workplace bullying behaviors

Workplace bullying involves isolation and exclusion, intimidation and threats, verbal threats, damaging professional identity, limiting career opportunities, obstructing work or making work-life difficult, and denial of due process and natural justice.

workplace socialization

The process by which new organizational members learn the rules (e.g., explicit policies, explicit procedures, etc.), norms (e.g., when you go on break, how to act at work, who to eat with, who not to eat with), and culture (e.g., innovation, risk-taking, team orientation, competitiveness) of an organization.

ANSWER KEYS

Chapter 1 Answer Key

1. e 2. c 3. e 4. e 5. b

Chapter 2 Answer Key

1. a 2. c 3. b 4. d 5. b

Chapter 3 Answer Key

1. c 2. d 3. d 4. b 5. c

Chapter 4 Answer Key

1. d 2. a 3. e 4. e 5. e

Chapter 5 Answer Key

1. b 2. c 3. a 4. b 5. e 6. d 7. a 8. a

Chapter 6 Answer Key

1. c 2. b 3. c 4. a 5. b

Chapter 7 Answer Key

1. e 2. d 3. d 4. e 5. e

Chapter 8 Answer Key

1. b 2. b 3. c 4. b 5. d

Chapter 9 Answer Key

1. e 2. c 3. a 4. d 5. d

Chapter 10 Answer Key

1. a 2. a 3. a 4. c 5. d

Chapter 11 Answer Key

1. d 2. d 3. c 4. d 5. a

Chapter 12 Answer Key

1. a 2. e 3. e 4. b 5. a

Chapter 13 Answer Key

1. e 2. e 3. b 4. d 5. c

Chapter 14 Answer Key

1. b 2. a 3. a 4. e 5. b

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