Interplay

FOURTEENTH EDITION

The Process of Interpersonal Communication

RONALD B. ADLER
LAWRENCE B. ROSENFELD
RUSSELL F. PROCTOR II

OXFORD
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Ronald B. Adler
Santa Barbara City College

Lawrence B. Rosenfeld
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Russell F. Proctor II
Northern Kentucky University

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Preface

A wise editor once told us that any revision to a successful textbook should be both familiar and fresh. It should include plenty of updated material, but it should retain the essence of its time-tested approach. We have worked hard to make sure this edition of *Interplay* achieves those goals.

This new edition builds on the approach that has served students and professors over almost four decades. The accessible writing style is based on the belief that even complicated ideas can be presented in a straightforward way. A variety of thought-provoking photos, sidebars, and cartoons make the subject more interesting and compelling. In terms of its scholarly grounding, *Interplay* cites more than 1,500 sources, nearly a third of which are new to this edition. These citations have a strong *communication* focus, as we continue to spotlight scholarship from our field. Research and theory aren't presented for their own sake, but rather to explain how the process of interpersonal communication operates in everyday life.

NEW IN THIS EDITION

One effective way of incorporating new concepts and research is to offer plenty of cutting-edge material in sidebars. Reviewers tell us these sidebars are essential to *Interplay*'s success, so we've updated them across the board.

- **Focus on Research** boxes—18 of which are new to this edition—cover timely subjects including the pros and cons of communicating via Snapchat, cultural differences in how speakers apologize, the relationship between Instagram and social comparison, the role of punctuation in text messages, relational struggles caused by cell phone use, disclosures between parents and their adult children, and the negative effects of mind-reading expectations.
- **Dark Side of Communication** sidebars address problems including how seemingly harmless labels can cause interpersonal damage, talking frankly about STDs, saying "sorry" too often, the dangers of multitasking, and the harmful effects of "ghosting."
- **Media Clips** use both television shows and films to dramatize how communication concepts operate in everyday life. New TV shows include *black-ish* (co-cultural communication), *This Is Us* (self-concept), *Game of Thrones* (language), *The Americans* (deception), *Speechless* (nonverbal communication), *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* (emotion management), and *Empire* (conflict). New feature films include *Wild* (social needs), *Meet the Patels* (culture), *Trainwreck* (relational dialectics), *Finding Dory* (family), and *Moonlight* (aggressiveness).
- **At Work** boxes help readers apply scholarship to their careers. New topics include letting your voice be heard (literally) on the job, relational repair at work, online relationships with coworkers, and keeping cool under fire.

- **Watch and Discuss** is a new feature in this edition. These thumbnail images point to YouTube videos for viewing in or out of the classroom and are followed by two discussion prompts each. Topics include mean tweets and disinhibition, "vaguebooking" (posting ambiguous messages on Facebook), how your body language can affect the way you feel, listening with empathy, privacy management and cell phones, whether women and men can "just be friends," passive aggressive communication, and "emotional correctness."
- **Assessing Your Communication** instruments in every chapter help students understand and improve how they communicate in important relationships. New instruments in this edition focus on social media use and relational maintenance skills.

We have also made many changes to the text proper to address the latest communication research and changing communication practices. These include the following:

- Chapter 1 includes two new topics: **masspersonal communication**—messages that are personal yet public; and **multimodality**—the ability and willingness to use multiple channels of communication.
- Chapter 2 offers new discussions on **code-switching**, **intersectionality**, and **communicating about disabilities**.
- Chapter 4 has enhanced coverage of **empathy** and the role it plays in helping communicators understand and appreciate each other.
- Chapter 5 offers a new summary of **gender** and **language** usage.
- Chapter 6 adds a review of research on how our own **nonverbal behavior** influences the way we feel.
- Chapter 8 provides new coverage of **self-talk** as a means for managing emotions.
- Chapter 10 updates and extends the discussion of **friendship** and describes the relational value of **singleness**.
- Chapter 11 moves up the topic of **conflict** and describes how **serial arguments** work in interpersonal communication.
- Chapter 12 now concludes the book with coverage of **communication climate**, which includes new and updated material on **confirming messages**, **aggressiveness**, **ostracism**, and the **language of choice**.

DIGITAL AND PRINT ANCILLARY RESOURCES

In addition to the text, a variety of ancillaries provide resources for both instructors and students. Whether you have taught with *Interplay* for many years or are encountering it for the first time, you will note that we use film, television, and other references to popular culture throughout the book to engage students and help them apply concepts. While this has long been a hallmark of our approach and book, we're pleased to now offer featured videos for students and instructors. Short clips from the Media Clip and Watch and Discuss features are now included on the student

website, in the course cartridges for your learning management system, and in OUP's Dashboard system and its integrated ebook.

Online Learning

- **Dashboard** delivers an enhanced ebook and interactive activities and assessments to track student progress in a simple and intuitive online environment. All Dashboard content is engineered to work on mobile devices, including Android and iOS platforms.
  With this edition's Dashboard, professors and students have more interactive and engaging content than ever before. Each chapter includes:
  - Brief audio and video chapter summaries to help students review the basics
  - Flashcards to help students master new vocabulary
  - Interactive drag-and-drop chapter summaries to test whether students know the basics and have the vocabulary in hand
  - Multiple-choice pre- and posttests (20 multiple-choice questions each) to assess students' knowledge and ability to understand and apply information
  - Media Clip and Watch and Discuss video clips with assessments, based on the book's features, to help students apply what they have learned
  - Interactive versions of the book's popular self-assessments to give students immediate feedback on their communication skills and behaviors
- **Course Cartridges for a variety of learning management systems—** including BlackBoard, Canvas, D2L, Moodle, and more—gives you Oxford's quality content in your learning management system in just a few clicks. The course cartridge for *Interplay* includes the test bank and the following resources and activities in every chapter: flashcards, pre- and posttests (20 multiple-choice questions each), audio and video chapter summaries, and **Media Clip** and **Watch and Discuss** video clips with multiple-choice assessments. With no new systems to learn and no access code for students, course cartridges make online assignments easy and accessible to all.

For Instructors

- The **Ancillary Resource Center (ARC)** at **www.oup-arc.com** is a convenient, instructor-focused, single destination for resources to accompany *Interplay*. Accessed online through individual user accounts, the ARC provides instructors with up-to-date ancillaries at any time while guaranteeing the security of grade-significant resources. In addition, it allows OUP to keep instructors informed when new content becomes available. The ARC for *Interplay* contains a variety of materials to aid in teaching:
  - An enhanced **Instructor's Manual and Computerized Test Bank** provides teaching tips, exercises, and test questions that will prove useful to both new and veteran instructors. The Instructor's

Manual includes teaching strategies, course outlines, plentiful in-class activities with specific instructions and teaching tips, discussion prompts, and journal prompts. The comprehensive Test Bank offers approximately 100 class-tested exam questions per chapter in multiple-choice, true/false, essay, and matching formats.

- **Newly revised PowerPoint-based lecture slides** have been redesigned for optimal utility and accessibility.

- ***Now Playing: Instructor's Edition***, an instructor-only online supplement, includes an introduction on how to incorporate film examples in class, sample responses to the numerous discussion questions in the student edition of *Now Playing*, viewing guides, additional films, and references.

Contact your Oxford University Press representative or call (800) 280–0280 for more information on accessing these resources.

For Students

- ***Now Playing: Learning Communication Through Film*** looks at contemporary and classic feature films through the lens of communication principles. *Now Playing* illustrates a variety of both individual scenes and full-length films, highlighting concepts and offering discussion questions for a mass medium that is interactive, familiar, and easily accessible. This resource gives you numerous film examples at your fingertips, saving you valuable preparation time. Contact your Oxford University Press representative or call (800) 280–0280 to package *Now Playing* with your textbook.
- The **companion website** at **www.oup.com/us/interplay** offers a wealth of free and open study resources for students: flashcards, video and audio chapter summaries, interactive self-tests, and **Media Clip** and **Watch and Discuss** video clips with multiple-choice assessments.

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Sandra Bodin-Lerner
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Colleen Butcher
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Leeva Chung
University of San Diego

Kathleen Czech
Point Loma Nazarene University

Andrea M. Davis
University of South Carolina Upstate

Katrina Eicher
Elizabethtown Community College

Susan Fletcher
Hocking College

Karyn Friesen
Lone Star College—Montgomery

Kristin K. Froemling
Radford University

Darlene J. Geiger
Portland State University

Debra Gonsher
Bronx Community College

Em Griffin
Wheaton College

Lowell Habel
Chapman University

Gail Hankins
Wake Technical College

Meredith Harrigan
SUNY Geneseo

Kristin Haun
University of Tennessee

Lisa C. Hebert
Louisiana State University

Brittany W. Hochstaetter
Wake Technical Community College

Shaorong Huang
Raymond Walters College—University of Cincinnati

Joy A. Jones
Atlantic Cape Community College

Beverly Merrill Kelley
California Lutheran University

Betty Kennan
Radford University

Anastasia Kurylo
Marymount Manhattan College

Andrea Lambert South
Northern Kentucky University

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Kelly Morrison
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Johance F. Murray
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Noreen Mysyk
North Central College

Gretchen R. Norling
University of West Florida

Joey Pogue
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Laurie Pratt
Chaffey College

Narissra Maria Punyanunt-Carter
Texas Tech University

Rasha I. Ramzy
Georgia State University

Rachel Reznik
Elmhurst College

Elizabeth Ribarsky
University of Illinois—Springfield

Gregory W. Rickert
Lexington Community College

Jennifer A. Samp
University of Georgia

Julie Simanski
Des Moines Area Community College

Debbie Sonandre
Tacoma Community College

Renee Strom
Saint Cloud State University

Dennis Sutton
Grand Rapids Community College

Judith Vogel
Des Moines Area Community College

Emanuelle Wessels
Missouri State University

Michael Wittig
Waukesha County Technical College

Gordon Young
Kingsborough Community College

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Ronald B. Adler is Professor Emeritus of Communication at Santa Barbara City College. He is coauthor of *Understanding Human Communication* (OUP, 2017); *Essential Communication* (OUP, 2018); *Looking Out, Looking In* (2016); and *Communicating at Work: Principles and Practices for Business and the Professions* (2013). Beyond his professional life, Ron tries to give back to his community. He also enjoys cycling, hiking, traveling, and spending time with his family.

Lawrence B. Rosenfeld is Professor Emeritus of Communication at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His articles appear in journals in communication, education, social work, sport psychology, and psychology, and he is the author of books on small-group, interpersonal, and nonverbal communication. Lawrence has received teaching and research awards from the National Communication Association and in 2012 received the William C. Friday Award for Excellence in Teaching. He is an artist and co-owner of Live Gently Art.

Russell F. Proctor II is Professor Emeritus of Communication at Northern Kentucky University. He won NKU's Outstanding Professor Award in 1997 and has also received recognition for his teaching from the National Communication Association, the Central States Communication Association, and the Kentucky Communication Association. Russ joined the *Interplay* team in the mid-1990s and was the lead author on this edition of the book. He loves sports, music, movies, and traveling with family and friends.

Interplay

1

Interpersonal Process

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1.1 Recognize the needs that communication satisfies.

1.2 Explain the interpersonal communication process: its transactional nature, governing principles, and characteristics.

1.3 Identify characteristics of effective communication and competent communicators.

1.4 Describe the advantages and drawbacks of various social media communication channels in relation to face-to-face communication.

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EVERYONE COMMUNICATES. Students and professors, parents and children, employers and employees, friends, strangers, and enemies—all communicate. We have been communicating with others from earliest childhood and will almost certainly keep doing so until we die.

Why study an activity you've done your entire life? First, studying interpersonal communication will give you a new look at a familiar topic. For instance, you may not have realized that you can't *not* communicate or that more communication doesn't always improve relationships—topics that you'll read about in a few pages. In this sense, exploring human communication is like studying anatomy or botany—everyday objects and processes take on new meaning.

A second, more compelling reason is that we all could stand to be more effective communicators. A nationwide survey identified "lack of effective communication" as the leading cause of relational breakups, ahead of money, relatives or in-laws, sexual problems, previous relationships, or children (National Communication Association, 1999). Ineffective communication is also a major problem in the workplace, as 62 percent of surveyed executives indicated in another study (American Management Association, 2012). Perhaps that's why parents identify communication as the most important skill set their children need to succeed in life (Goo, 2015).

Pause now to make a mental list of communication problems you have encountered. You'll probably see that no matter how successful your relationships are at home, with friends, at school, and at work, there is plenty of room for improvement in your everyday life. The information that follows will help you communicate better with some of the people who matter most to you.

WHY WE COMMUNICATE

Research demonstrating the importance of communication has been around longer than you might think. Frederick II, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire from 1220 to 1250, carried out language deprivation experiments. A medieval historian described a dramatically inhumane one:

> He bade foster mothers and nurses to suckle the children, to bathe and wash them, but in no way to prattle with them, for he wanted to learn whether they would speak the Hebrew language, which was the oldest, or Greek, or Latin, or Arabic, or perhaps the language of their parents, of whom they had been born. But he labored in vain because all the children died. For they could not live without the petting and joyful faces and loving words of their foster mothers. (Ross & McLaughlin, 1949, p. 366)

Contemporary researchers have found less barbaric ways to investigate the importance of communication. In one classic study of isolation, five participants were paid to remain alone in a locked room. One lasted for 8 days. Three held out for 2 days, one commenting, "Never again." The fifth participant lasted only 2 hours (Schachter, 1959).

Real-life experiences also demonstrate our strong need for contact. Reflecting on his seven years as a hostage in Lebanon, former news

correspondent Terry Anderson said point-blank, "I would rather have had the worst companion than no companion at all" (Gawande, 2009).

You might claim that solitude would be a welcome relief at times. It's true that all of us need time by ourselves, often more than we get. On the other hand, each of us has a point beyond which solitude becomes painful. In other words, we all need people. We all need to communicate.

After spending a year alone in space, astronaut Scott Kelly described his biggest challenge: "I think the hardest part is being isolated in a physical sense from people on the ground that are important to you." ***How satisfied are you with the amount and quality of personal contact in your life? What would be the ideal amount of contact?***

PHYSICAL NEEDS

Communication is so important that its presence or absence affects health. People who process a negative experience by talking about it report improved life satisfaction, as well as enhanced mental and physical health, compared with those who only think privately about it (Francis, 2003; Sousa, 2002). Research conducted with police officers found that being able to talk easily with colleagues and supervisors about work-related trauma was linked to greater physical and mental health (Stephens & Long, 2000). And a broader study of over 3,500 adults revealed that as little as 10 minutes of talking a day, face to face or by phone, improves memory and boosts intellectual function (Ybarra et al., 2008).

In extreme cases, communication can even become a matter of life or death. As a Navy pilot, U.S. Senator John McCain was shot down over North Vietnam and held as a prisoner of war (POW) for six years, often in solitary confinement. POWs in his camp set up codes to send messages by tapping on walls to laboriously spell out words. McCain describes the importance of maintaining contact with one another despite serious risks:

> The punishment for communicating could be severe, and a few POWs, having been caught and beaten for their efforts, had their spirits broken as their bodies were battered. Terrified of a return trip to the punishment room, they would lie still in their cells when their comrades tried to tap them up on the wall. Very few would remain uncommunicative for long. To suffer all this alone was less tolerable than torture. Withdrawing in silence from the fellowship of other Americans . . . was to us the approach of death. (McCain, 1999, p. 12)

Communication isn't a necessity just for prisoners of war. Evidence gathered by a host of researchers (e.g., Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010; Parker-Pope, 2010; Yang et al., 2016) has shown that interpersonal communication is vital among civilians as well. For example:

- A meta-analysis of nearly 150 studies involving a total of over 300,000 participants found that socially connected people—those with strong networks of family and friends—live an average of 3.7 years longer than those who are socially isolated.

Media Clip

Solitude and Connection: *Wild*

Striving to escape grief and a life plagued by personal mistakes, Cheryl Strayed (Reese Witherspoon) embarks on a solitary thousand-mile trek along the rugged Pacific Crest Trail.

In the wilderness, Strayed spends much of her time reflecting on the past and pondering her options for the future. In her self-enforced solitude, she also discovers the value of human connection. She eagerly seeks out encounters with other hikers to alleviate loneliness, satisfy practical needs for food and water, and answer questions about her own identity. Both solitude and communication help her come to terms with who she is and who she wants to become.

Strayed's journey illustrates many of the reasons we communicate. Not far into her adventure she exclaims to herself, "I like talking to people. Listening to people . . . that's a hobby of mine I hadn't even realized I had."

In her wilderness quest, Strayed learns a lesson that applies to us all: Solitude and reflection can prepare us to embark on healthier relationships.

- People with strong relationships have significantly lower risks of coronary disease, hypertension, and obesity than do people with less social integration.
- Divorced, separated, or widowed people are 5 to 10 times more likely to need hospitalization for mental illnesses than their married counterparts. Happily married people also have lower incidences of pneumonia, surgery, and cancer than single people. (It's important to note that the *quality* of the relationship is more important than the institution of marriage in these studies.)

Such research demonstrates the importance of meaningful personal relationships and explains why social scientists conclude that communication is indispensable for health. Not everyone needs the same amount of contact, and the quality of communication is almost certainly as important as the quantity. Nonetheless, the point remains: Personal communication is essential for our well-being.

IDENTITY NEEDS

Communication does more than enable us to survive. It is the primary way we learn who we are (Harwood, 2005). As you'll read in Chapter 3, our sense of identity comes from the ways we interact with other people. Are we smart or stupid, attractive or ugly, skillful or inept? The answers to these questions don't come from looking in the mirror. The reactions of others shape who we are.

Deprived of communication with others, we would have no sense of identity. Consider the case of the famous "Wild Boy of Aveyron," who spent his early childhood without any apparent human contact. The boy was discovered in January 1800 while digging for vegetables in a French village garden. He could not speak, and he showed no behaviors one would expect in a social human. More significant than this absence of social skills was his lack of any identity as a human being. As author Roger Shattuck (1980) put it, "The boy had no human sense of being in the world. He had no sense of himself as a person related to other persons" (p. 37). Only after the influence of a loving "mother" did the boy begin to behave as a human.

Contemporary accounts support the essential role communication plays in shaping identity. In some cases, feral children—those raised with limited or no human contact—have demonstrated communication patterns similar to those of animals they grew up around (Newton, 2002). They do not appear to have developed a sense of themselves as humans before interacting with other people. Similarly, *Dani's Story* (Lierow, 2011) tells of an abandoned child who was rescued by a loving family and taught to communicate. After considerable time and investment, she was ultimately able to say of herself, "I pretty."

Each of us enters the world with little or no sense of identity. We gain an idea of who we are from the way others define us. As we explain in Chapter 3, the messages we receive in early childhood are the strongest identity shapers, but the influence of others continues throughout life.

SOCIAL NEEDS

Some social scientists have argued that besides helping define who we are, communication is the principal way relationships are created. For example, Julie Yingling (1994) asserts that children "talk friendships into existence." The same can be said for adult relationships: It's impossible to imagine how they could exist without communication. These relationships satisfy a variety of social needs, such as giving and receiving affection, having fun, helping others and being helped, and developing a sense of self-worth (Rubin et al., 1988). Because relationships with others are vital, some theorists have gone so far as to argue that communication is the primary goal of human existence. One anthropologist (Goldschmidt, 1990) calls the drive for meeting social needs through communication "the human career."

There's a strong link between the quality of communication and the success of relationships. For example, children who grow up in strong conversation-oriented families report having more satisfying same-sex friendships and romantic relationships when they become adults (Koesten, 2004). Women in one study reported that "socializing" contributed more to a satisfying life than virtually any other activity, including relaxing, shopping, eating, exercise, television, or prayer (Kahneman et al., 2004).

DARK SIDE OF COMMUNICATION

Loneliness and the Internet: A Delicate Balance

It's Friday night and you have no plans. You don't want to spend the evening by yourself, but it feels like a chore to go out and socialize. Instead, you decide to stay in and interact with others online—perhaps with friends, or maybe with strangers. Is that a good way to meet your social needs? The simple answer is "occasionally, but not regularly."

Research about online communication and loneliness presents a mixed bag. Connecting with others online can help alleviate lonely feelings (Lee et al., 2013), particularly for those who find it challenging to get out and about (Cotten et al., 2013). On the other hand, there's a correlation between loneliness and what social scientists call a *preference for online social interaction* (Chung, 2013). The cause-effect relationship isn't always clear, but research shows that lonely people prefer to interact with others online, which can lead to problematic internet use, which can create a greater sense of loneliness (Kim et al., 2009; Tokunaga, 2016).

The key to healthy communication lies in a principle we discuss frequently in this book: all things in moderation. When online communication complements and reinforces in-person relationships, it can be a wonderful tool for meeting social needs. When it mostly or completely replaces face-to-face interaction, there may be cause for concern. The Assessing Your Communication box on page 24 can help you determine whether your online and in-person communication are in balance.

Despite knowing that communication is crucial to social satisfaction, evidence suggests that many people aren't very successful at managing their interpersonal relationships. For example, one-third of Americans say they've never interacted with their neighbors, up from one-fifth who said the same just a few decades ago (Poon, 2015). Research also shows that the number of friendships is in decline. One survey (McPherson et al., 2006) reported that in 1985, Americans had an average of 2.94 close friends. Twenty years later, that number had dropped to 2.08. It's worth noting that in this same study, more-educated Americans reported having larger and more diverse networks. In other words, higher education can enhance your relational life as well as your intellect.

PRACTICAL NEEDS

Along with satisfying physical, identity, and social needs, communication is essential in dealing with more practical matters. It's the tool that lets us tell the hairstylist to take just a little off the sides, direct the doctor to where it hurts, and inform the plumber that the broken pipe needs attention *now*!

Beyond these obvious needs, a wealth of research demonstrates that communication is an essential ingredient for success in virtually every career. (See the At Work box on page 9.) On-the-job communication skills can even make the difference between life and death for doctors, nurses, and other medical practitioners. Researchers discovered that "communication failures" in hospitals and doctors' offices were linked to more than 1,700 U.S. deaths in a recent five-year period (Bailey, 2016). Studies also show a significant difference between the communication skills of physicians who had no malpractice claims against them and doctors with previous claims (Carroll, 2015).

Communication is just as important outside of work. For example, married couples who are effective communicators report happier relationships than less skillful husbands and wives (Ridley et al., 2001)—a finding that has been supported across cultures (Rehman & Holtzworth-Munroe, 2007). And the effects of work–family conflict—a common occurrence that negatively affects marital satisfaction—can be mitigated with constructive communication (Carroll et al., 2013). In school, grade-point averages of college students are related positively to their communication competence (Hawken et al., 1991). In addition, school adjustment, dropout rate, and overall school achievement are highly related to students' having strong, supportive relationships (Heard, 2007).

Psychologist Abraham Maslow (1968) suggests that human needs fall into five categories, each of which must be satisfied before we concern ourselves with the next one. As you read about each need, think about the ways in which communication is often necessary to satisfy it. The most basic needs are *physical*: sufficient air, water, food, and rest and the ability to reproduce as a species. The second category of Maslow's needs involves *safety*: protection from threats to our well-being. Beyond physical and safety concerns are the *social* needs described earlier. Next, Maslow suggests that each of us has the need for *self-esteem*: the desire to believe that

@work Communication and Career Advancement

No matter the field, research supports what experienced workers already know—that communication skills are crucial in finding and succeeding in a job. A survey of business leaders rated abilities in spoken and written communication as the most important skills for college graduates to possess (Supiano, 2013). In a later study with similar results, employers told college students that oral communication skills, and particularly interpersonal communication, are essential for workplace success (Coffelt et al., 2016). It's no wonder that job ads ask for competence in "oral and written communication" more than any other skill set—by a wide margin (Anderson & Gantz, 2013).

Once you're hired, the need for communication skills is important in virtually every career. Engineers spend the bulk of their working lives speaking and listening, mostly in one-on-one and small-group settings (Darling & Dannels, 2003). Accounting professionals spend 80 percent of their time on the job communicating with others, individually and in groups (Nellermoe et al., 1999). Oral and written communication skills are also vital in the computer industry, according to Silicon Valley employers (Stevens, 2005). Writing in *The Scientist* magazine, a commentator echoed this sentiment: "If I give any advice, it is that you can never do enough training around your overall communication skills" (Richman, 2002).

we are worthwhile, valuable people. The final category of needs involves *self-actualization*: the desire to develop our potential to the maximum, to become the best person we can be.

THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

So far, we have talked about communication as if its meaning were perfectly clear. In fact, scholars have debated the definition of communication for years (Littlejohn, 2008). Despite their many disagreements, most would concur that at its essence, **communication** is about using messages to generate meanings (Korn et al., 2000). Notice how this basic definition holds true across a variety of contexts—public speaking, small groups, mass media, and so forth. The goal of this section is to explain how messages and meanings are created in interpersonal communication and to describe the many factors involved in this complex process.

EARLY MODELS OF COMMUNICATION

As the old saying goes, "A picture is worth a thousand words." With that principle in mind, social scientists of the 1950s created models of the communication process. These early, simplistic models characterized communication as a one-way, linear event—something that a sender "does" by encoding a message and delivering it to a passive receiver who decodes it. This one-way process resembles an archer (the sender) shooting an arrow (the message) at a target (the receiver). For some examples of

communication, a linear model can be fitting. If you labor over a thank-you note to get the tone just right before sending it, your message is primarily a one-way effort.

Later models represented communication as more of a tennis game, in which players hit balls (send messages) to receivers who then respond. This **feedback**, or response to a previous message, can be verbal or nonverbal. A back-and-forth chain of text messages seems to fit this description pretty well.

Yet those models fail to capture the complexity of the human beings involved in the process. Over time, communication theorists developed increasingly sophisticated versions in an attempt to depict all the factors that affect human interaction.

INSIGHTS FROM THE TRANSACTIONAL COMMUNICATION MODEL

No model can completely represent the process of communication, any more than a map can capture everything about the neighborhood where you live. Still, Figure 1.1 reflects a number of important characteristics of **transactional communication**, the dynamic process in which communicators create meaning together through interaction.

Sending and Receiving Are Usually Simultaneous

Some forms of communication, such as email, texting, voice messages, or "snail mail" letters, are asynchronous: There's a delay between when they are sent and received. But in face-to-face interaction, it's hard to distinguish sender and receiver. Consider a few examples:

- A teacher explaining a difficult concept to a student after class
- A parent lecturing a teenager about the family's curfew rules
- A salesperson giving a customer information about a product

The impulse is to identify the teacher, parent, and salesperson as senders, whereas the student, teenager, and customer are receivers. Now imagine a confused look on the student's face; the teenager interrupting defensively; the customer blankly staring into the distance. It's easy to see

FIGURE 1.1 Transactional Communication Model

that these verbal and nonverbal responses are messages being sent, even while the other person is talking. Because it's often impossible to distinguish sender from receiver, our communication model replaces these roles with the more accurate term *communicator*. This term reflects the fact that—at least in face-to-face situations—people are simultaneously senders and receivers who exchange multiple messages.

Meanings Exist in and Among People

Messages, whether verbal or nonverbal, don't have meanings in themselves. Rather, meanings reside in the people who express and interpret them. Imagine that a friend says, "I'm sorry," after showing up several hours late to a date. This expression might be a genuine apology, an insincere statement designed to defuse your anger, or even a sarcastic jibe. It's easy to imagine that your friend might mean one thing and you might have a different interpretation of it. The possibility of multiple interpretations means that it is often necessary to negotiate a shared meaning in order for satisfying communication to occur (the perception-checking skills described in Chapter 4 can help with this).

Environment and Noise Affect Communication

Problems often arise because communicators occupy different **environments** (sometimes called *contexts*): fields of experience that help them make sense of others' behavior. In communication terminology, *environment* refers not only to a physical location but also to the personal experiences and cultural background that participants bring to a conversation. You can appreciate the influence of environments by considering your beliefs about an important topic such as work, marriage, or government policies. How might your beliefs be different if your personal history were different?

Notice how the model in Figure 1.1 shows that the environments of **A** and **B** overlap. This intersecting area represents the background that the communicators have in common. If this overlap didn't exist, communication would be difficult, if not impossible.

Whereas similar environments often facilitate communication, different backgrounds can make effective communication more challenging. Consider just some of the factors that might contribute to different environments, and to communication challenges as a result:

- **A** might belong to one ethnic group and **B** to another.
- **A** might be rich and **B** poor.
- **A** might be rushed and **B** have nowhere to go.
- **A** might have lived a long, eventful life, and **B** could be young and inexperienced.
- **A** might be passionately concerned with the subject and **B** indifferent to it.

Another factor in the environment that makes communication difficult is what communication scholars call **noise**: anything that interferes with the transmission and reception of a message. Three types of noise

can disrupt communication. *External noise* includes factors outside the receiver that make it difficult to hear, as well as many other kinds of distractions. For instance, loud music in a bar or a jackhammer grinding in the street might make it hard for you to pay attention to another person. *Physiological noise* involves biological factors in the receiver that interfere with accurate reception: hearing loss, illness, and so on. *Psychological noise* refers to cognitive factors that make communication less effective. For instance, a woman who is called "girl" may become so irritated that she has trouble listening objectively to the rest of a speaker's message.

Channels Make a Difference

Communication scholars use the term **channel** to describe the medium through which messages are exchanged (Berger & Iyengar, 2013; Ledbetter, 2014). Along with face-to-face interaction, we have the option of using **mediated communication**: sending messages via technological channels such as phones, email, and the internet. The communication channel being used can affect the way a receiver responds to a message. For example, a string of texted emojis probably won't have the same effect as a handwritten expression of affection, and being fired from a job in person would likely feel different from getting the bad news in an email.

Most people intuitively recognize that the selection of a channel depends in part on the kind of message they're sending. One survey asked students to identify which channel they would find best for delivering a variety of messages (O'Sullivan, 2000). Most respondents said they would have

FOCUS ON RESEARCH

Tweeting: The Channel Affects the Message

In the years since Marshall McLuhan famously declared that "the medium is the message," scholars have studied the impact of communication channels on the messages they convey. Obviously it makes a difference whether you send a message in person, by phone, or through social media. A research team investigated an even more specific issue: Do Twitter messages created on mobile devices differ from those created on computers?

The short answer to that question is yes. In analyzing some 235 million tweets over a 6-week period, the researchers were able to determine whether the posts originated from mobile devices or from desktop computers. They found that mobile tweets were more egocentric than tweets from computers—that is, they included more first-person pronouns such as *I*, *me*, *my*, and *mine*. Tweets sent from mobile devices were also more negative in their wording and content. In other words, a tweet with the phrase "I'm mad" is more likely to be posted from a phone than a desktop. The researchers speculated that mobile devices encourage more spontaneous communication—for better or for worse.

As you'll read in Chapter 3, wise communicators consider pros and cons before making self-disclosures. This research suggests that the medium you choose for sending a message may play an important role in that process.

Murthy, D., Bowman, S., Gross, A. J., & McGarry, M. (2015). Do we tweet differently from our mobile devices? A study of language differences on mobile and web-based Twitter platforms. *Journal of Communication, 65,* 816–837.

little trouble sending positive messages face to face, but that mediated channels had more appeal for sending negative messages (see also Feaster, 2010). You'll read much more about social media channels later in this chapter and throughout this book.

Like dancing, communication is a transactional process that you do *with* others, not *to* them. ***How would you describe the nature of the communication transactions in your close relationships? In what ways is it similar to dancing with a partner?***

COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES

Beyond communication models, several principles explain the nature of communication.

Communication Is Transactional

As we saw in the transactional model, communicators create meaning through their interaction with one another. Perhaps the most important consequence of communication's transactional nature is mutual influence. To put it simply, communication isn't something we do *to* others; rather, it is an activity we do *with* them.

Communication is like dancing with a partner: No matter how skilled you are, success depends on the other person's behavior as well as your own. In communication and in dancing, the partners must adapt to and coordinate with each other. Further, relational communication—like dancing—is a unique creation that arises from how the partners interact. The way you dance probably varies from one partner to another because of its cooperative, transactional nature. Likewise, the way you communicate almost certainly varies with different partners. That's why competent communicators score high in adaptability, as you'll read later in this chapter.

Psychologist Kenneth Gergen (1991) expresses the transactional nature of communication well when he points out how our success depends on interaction with others. As he says, "one cannot be 'attractive' without others who are attracted, a 'leader' without others willing to follow, or a 'loving person' without others to affirm with appreciation" (p. 158).

Communication Can Be Intentional or Unintentional

Some communication is clearly deliberate: You probably plan your words carefully before asking the boss for a raise or offering constructive criticism. Some scholars (e.g., Motley, 1990) argue that only intentional messages like these qualify as communication. However, others (e.g., Buck & VanLear, 2002) suggest that even unintentional behavior is communicative. Suppose, for instance, that a friend overhears you muttering complaints to yourself. Even though you didn't intend for her to hear your remarks, they certainly did carry a message. In addition to these slips of the tongue, we unintentionally send many nonverbal messages. You might not be aware of your sour expression, impatient shifting, or sighs of boredom, but others read into them nonetheless.

"Let's stop this before we both say a lot of things we mean."

Even the seeming absence of a behavior has communicative value. Recall times when you sent a text or left a voice message and received no reply. You probably assigned some meaning to the nonresponse. Was the other person angry? Indifferent? Too busy to reply? Whether your hunch was correct, the point remains: All behavior has communicative value. "Nothing" never happens.

In *Interplay* we look at the communicative value of both intentional and unintentional behavior. This book takes the position that whatever you do—whether you speak or remain silent, confront or avoid, show emotion or keep a poker face—you provide information to others about your thoughts and feelings. In this sense, we are like transmitters that can't be shut off. We cannot *not* communicate (Watzlawick et al., 1967).

Communication Is Irreversible

We sometimes wish that we could back up in time, erasing words or acts and replacing them with better alternatives. Unfortunately, such reversal is impossible. Sometimes, further explanation can clear up confusion, or an apology can mollify hurt feelings, but other times no amount of explanation can change the impression you have created. It is no more possible to "unsend" a message—including most digital messages—than to "unsqueeze" a tube of toothpaste. Words said, messages sent, and deeds done are irretrievable.

Communication Is Unrepeatable

Because communication is an ongoing process, an event cannot be repeated. The friendly smile you gave a stranger last week may not succeed with the person you encounter tomorrow. Even with the same person, it's impossible to recreate an event. Why? Because both you and the other person have changed. You've both lived longer, and your feelings about each other may have changed. What may seem like the same words and behavior are different each time they are spoken or performed.

Communication Has a Content Dimension and a Relational Dimension

Virtually all exchanges have content and relational dimensions. The **content dimension** involves the information being explicitly discussed: "Please pass the salt"; "Not now, I'm tired"; "You forgot to check your messages." In addition to this sort of obvious content, all messages also have a **relational dimension** (Watzlawick et al., 1967) that expresses how you feel about the other person: whether you like or dislike the other person, feel in control or subordinate, feel comfortable or anxious, and so on. For instance, consider the various relational messages you could communicate by simply saying "Thanks a lot" in different ways. You can appreciate the importance of communication's relational dimension by looking at the photo on page 15. What does this

image convey about the relationship between the two people?

Sometimes the content dimension of a message is all that matters. For example, you may not care how the barista feels about you as long as you get your coffee. In a qualitative sense, however, the relational dimension of a message is often more important than the content under discussion. This point explains why disputes over apparently trivial subjects become so important. In such cases, we're not really arguing over whose turn it is to take out the trash or whether to stay home or go out. Instead, we're disputing the nature of the relationship: who's in control, and how important are we to each other? Chapter 9 explores several key relational issues in detail. For now, let's turn to defining interpersonal communication.

Along with its content, all communication conveys both verbal and nonverbal relational messages. ***What relational messages do you convey when communicating about everyday matters?***

THE NATURE OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

As you just read, every exchange—even the most mundane—has a relational dimension. Visualize a brief conversation you've recently had with a cashier. Was it friendly or indifferent? Rushed or more leisurely? In every case, the exchanged messages both created and reflected some sort of relationship. In more meaningful relationships, communication is distinctive and nuanced—more *personal*. It's helpful, therefore, to view communication with others on a continuum, ranging from impersonal to interpersonal (see Figure 1.2).

Many of our interactions in life are relatively impersonal, but more meaningful communication characterizes our key relationships. As discussed in this book, **interpersonal communication** is interaction distinguished by the qualities of uniqueness, interdependence, self-disclosure, and intrinsic rewards. Let's explore each component of this definition.

Characteristics of Interpersonal Communication

Four features distinguish communication in highly interpersonal relationships from less personal ones:

- The first is *uniqueness*. Whereas social rules and rituals govern impersonal exchanges, the nature and history of particular relationships shape interpersonal exchanges. For example, with one friend you

FIGURE 1.2 Impersonal–Interpersonal Communication Continuum

might exchange good-natured insults, whereas with another you are careful never to offend. Consider how you communicate with those closest to you and you'll recognize that each relationship is defined by its own specific language, customs, and pattern—what communication scholars call a *relational culture* (Farrell et al., 2014).

- The second feature that distinguishes interpersonal communication is *interdependence*. Highly interpersonal communication exchanges reveal that the fate of the partners is connected. In an impersonal relationship, such as with a restaurant server you don't know, you might be able to brush off the other's anger, affection, excitement, or depression. But in an interpersonal relationship, the other's life affects you.
- The third feature is *self-disclosure*. In impersonal exchanges, we reveal little about ourselves; but in interpersonal exchanges, we often share important thoughts and feelings, usually reflecting our comfort with one another. This doesn't mean that all highly interpersonal relationships are warm and caring or that all self-disclosure is positive. It's possible to reveal negative personal information: "I really hate when you do that!" But note you'd probably say that only to someone with whom you have an interpersonal relationship.
- The fourth feature has to do with the *intrinsic rewards* of interacting. Communicators in relationships characterized by impersonal exchanges seek extrinsic rewards—payoffs that have little to do with the people involved. You listen to professors in class or talk to potential buyers of your used car in order to reach goals that have little to do with developing personal relationships. By contrast, you spend time in highly interpersonal relationships, such as relationships with friends and lovers, because of the intrinsic rewards that come from your communication. Just being with the other person is the reward. It doesn't matter what you talk about—developing the relationship is what's important.

Relatively few of our interactions are highly interpersonal. The scarcity of interpersonal communication, however, contributes to its value (Mehl et al., 2010). Like precious and one-of-a-kind artwork, highly interpersonal communication is special because it is rare. It's even fairly scarce in close relationships, where much of our daily communication is comfortably mundane (Alberts et al., 2005). Those special relationships, however, provide the best opportunities to communicate interpersonally—and that's why Chapter 10 focuses on them.

Masspersonal Communication

After reading the characteristics just outlined, you might be thinking about interpersonal communication as a *private* rather than a *public* exchange. For instance, many people would be reluctant to broadcast self-disclosures to an audience, and a relationship might not feel unique if it's shared with hundreds of others. In this respect, it's easy to regard interpersonal communication as something that happens only in private, one-on-one relationships.

But the emergence of social media has led to some changes in that thinking. The fact is, when you post a message on a friend's social networking page ("I heard about your new job—congratulations!"), that's

FIGURE 1.3 Examples of Mass, Interpersonal, and Masspersonal Communication

Adapted from O'Sullivan & Carr, 2017.

both personal and public. The message is meant for your friend, but others view and evaluate it. You probably have those others in mind as you craft the message—otherwise, you could have sent a private text or email. In the same vein, many blog authors and tweeters interact with their followers, creating a sense of community (Lee & Jang, 2013). Mediated messages that are broadcast one-to-many are typically categorized as "mass communication," but that label doesn't capture the nature of some personal messages aimed at large audiences.

As a way of clarifying the personal nature of some public messages, communication scholars (O'Sullivan & Carr, 2017) suggest we need a new label. **Masspersonal communication** characterizes interaction that crosses boundaries between mass and interpersonal contexts. Figure 1.3 illustrates some such intersections and the channels they use. It's easy to see how masspersonal communication can enhance a relationship's uniqueness, interdependence, self-disclosure, and intrinsic rewards.

COMMUNICATION MISCONCEPTIONS

Now that you've learned what communication *is*, it's time to identify some things it *isn't*. Avoiding these common misconceptions (adapted from McCroskey & Richmond, 1996) can save you a great deal of trouble in your personal life.

Not All Communication Seeks Understanding

You might assume that the goal of all communication is to maximize understanding between communicators. But although some understanding is necessary to coordinate our interactions, there are some types of

communication in which understanding, as we usually conceive it, isn't the primary goal. Consider, for example, the following:

- *Social rituals we enact every day.* "How's it going?" you ask. "Great," the other person replies, even if he or she isn't actually feeling great. The primary goal in exchanges like these is mutual acknowledgment. The unstated message is "I consider you important enough to notice." There's obviously no serious attempt to exchange information (Burnard, 2003). An analysis of examples from Twitter shows how this social ritual to "keep in touch" can take place digitally as well as in person (Schandorf, 2013).
- *Many attempts to influence others.* Most television commercials are aimed at persuading viewers to buy products, not helping viewers understand the content of the ad. In the same way, many of our attempts at persuading others don't involve a desire for understanding, just for compliance with our wishes.
- *Deliberate ambiguity and deception.* When you decline an unwanted invitation by saying "I can't make it," you probably want to create the impression that the decision is really beyond your control. (If your goal were to be perfectly clear, you might say, "I don't want to get together. In fact, I'd rather do almost anything than accept your invitation.") As we explain in detail in Chapter 3, people often lie or hedge their remarks precisely because they want to obscure their true thoughts and feelings.

More Communication Is Not Always Better

Whereas failure to communicate effectively and often enough can certainly cause problems, excessive communication also can be a mistake. Sometimes it is simply unproductive, as when people go over the same ground again and again.

There are times when talking too much actually aggravates a problem. As McCroskey and Wheeless (1976) put it, "More and more negative communication merely leads to more and more negative results" (p. 5). Even when relationships aren't troubled, less communication may be better than more. One study found that coworkers who aren't highly dependent on one another perform better when they don't spend a great deal of time talking together (Barrick et al., 2007). There are even times when no interaction is the best course. When two people are angry and hurt, they may say things they don't mean and will later regret. In such cases it's probably best to spend time cooling off, thinking about what to say and how to say it. Chapter 8 will help you decide when and how to share feelings.

Communication Will Not Solve All Problems

Sometimes even the best planned, best timed communication won't solve a problem. For example, imagine that you ask an instructor to explain why you received a poor grade on a project you believe deserved top marks. The professor clearly outlines the reasons why you received the low grade and sticks to that position after listening thoughtfully to your protests. Has communication solved the problem? Hardly.

Sometimes clear communication is even the cause of problems. Suppose, for example, that a friend asks you for an honest opinion of an expensive outfit he just bought. Your clear and sincere answer, "I think it makes you look fat," might do more harm than good. Deciding when and how to self-disclose isn't always easy. See Chapter 3 for suggestions.

Effective Communication Is Not a Natural Ability

Most people assume that communication is like breathing—that it's something people can do without training. Although nearly everyone does manage to function passably without much formal communication training, most people operate at a level of effectiveness far below their potential. In fact, communication skills are closer to an athletic ability. Even the most inept of us can learn to be more effective with training and practice, and even the most talented need to "keep in shape." With this in mind, it's time to look at what's involved in communicating more competently.

COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

"What does it take to communicate better?" is probably the most important question to ask as you read this book. Answering it has been one of the leading challenges for communication scholars. Although we don't have all the answers, research has identified a great deal of important and useful information about communication competence.

PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

Most scholars agree that **communication competence** is the ability to achieve goals in a manner both *effective* and *appropriate* (Spitzberg, 2000). To understand these two dimensions, consider how you might handle everyday communication challenges such as declining an unwanted invitation or asking a friend to stop an annoying behavior. In cases such as these, *effective* communication would get the results you want. *Appropriate* communication would do so in a way that, in most cases, enhances the relationship in which it occurs.

You can appreciate the importance of both appropriateness and effectiveness by imagining approaches that would satisfy one of these criteria but not the other. Yelling at your restaurant server may get your meal to come quickly, but you probably wouldn't be welcome back (and you might want to check your food before eating it). Likewise, saying "That's fine" to your roommate when things *aren't* fine might maintain the relationship but leave you frustrated. With the goal of encouraging a balance between effectiveness and appropriateness, the following paragraphs outline several important principles of communication competence.

On the TV show *Hell's Kitchen*, chef Gordon Ramsay gets the job done—but often treats his staff poorly in the process. On *MasterChef Junior*, he demonstrates that he can be both effective *and* appropriate as a cooking coach. ***Does your communication competence change from situation to situation?***

There Is No Single "Ideal" or "Effective" Way to Communicate

Your own experience shows that a variety of communication styles can be effective. Some very successful communicators are serious, whereas others use humor; some are gregarious, others are quieter; and some are more

straightforward, while others hint diplomatically. Furthermore, a type of communication that is competent in one setting might be a colossal blunder in another, and what one person thinks is competent may seem incompetent to another (Dunleavy & Martin, 2010). The joking insults you routinely trade with a friend might offend a sensitive family member, and Saturday night's romantic approach would be out of place at work on Monday morning. No list of rules or tips will guarantee your success as a communicator.

Flexibility is especially important when members of different cultures meet. Some communication skills seem to be universal (Ruben, 1989). Every culture has rules that require speakers to behave appropriately, for example. But the definition of appropriate communication in a given situation varies considerably from one culture to another (Arasaratnam, 2007). Customs such as belching after a meal or appearing nude in public might be appropriate in some parts of the world but outrageous in others. There are also more subtle differences in competent communication. For example, qualities such as self-disclosure and straight talk may be valued in the United States but considered overly aggressive and insensitive in many Asian cultures (Zhang, 2015). You'll read more about the many dimensions of intercultural competence in Chapter 2.

Competence Is Situational

Because competent behavior varies so much from one situation and person to another, it's a mistake to think that communication competence is a trait that a person either possesses or lacks (Spitzberg, 1991). It's more accurate to talk about degrees or areas of competence.

You and the people you know are probably quite competent in some areas and less so in others. For example, you might deal quite skillfully with peers while feeling clumsy interacting with people much older or younger, wealthier or poorer, or more or less attractive than yourself. In fact, your competence may vary from situation to situation. It's an overgeneralization to say, in a moment of distress, "I'm a terrible communicator!" It's more accurate to say, "I didn't handle this situation very well, but I'm better in others."

Competence Can Be Learned

To some degree, biology is destiny when it comes to communication competence (Teven et al., 2010). Research suggests that certain personality traits predispose people toward particular competence skills (Hullman et al., 2010). For instance, those who are agreeable and conscientious by nature find it easier to be appropriate and harder to be (and become) assertive and effective.

Fortunately, biology isn't the only factor that shapes how we communicate. Communication competence is, to a great degree, a set of skills that anyone can learn (Fortney et al., 2001). For instance, people with communication anxiety often benefit from interpersonal training sessions (Dwyer, 2000). Skills instruction has also been shown to help communicators in a variety of professional fields (Brown et al., 2010; Hynes, 2012). Even

without systematic training, it's possible to develop communication skills through the processes of observation and trial and error. We learn from our own successes and failures, as well as from observing other models—both positive and negative. And, of course, it's our hope that you will become a more competent communicator as a result of putting the information in this book to work.

CHARACTERISTICS OF COMPETENT COMMUNICATION

Although competent communication varies from one situation to another, scholars have identified several common denominators that characterize it in most contexts.

A Large Repertoire of Skills

As you've already seen, good communicators don't use the same approach in every situation. They know that sometimes it's best to be blunt and sometimes tactful; that there is a time to speak up and a time to be quiet.

The chances of reaching your personal and relational goals increase with the number of options you have about how to communicate (Pillet-Shore, 2011). For example, if you want to start a conversation with a stranger, you might get the ball rolling simply by introducing yourself. In other cases, seeking assistance might work well: "I've just moved here. What kind of neighborhood is the Eastside?" A third strategy is to ask a question about the situation: "I've never heard this band before. Do you know anything about them?" You could also offer a sincere compliment and follow it up with a question: "Great shoes! Where did you get them?" Just as a chef draws from a wide range of herbs and spices, a competent communicator can draw from a large array of potential behaviors.

Adaptability

To extend this metaphor, a chef must know when to use garlic, chili, or sugar. Likewise, a competent communicator needs *adaptability*, selecting appropriate responses for each situation—and for each recipient. Adaptability is so important that competence researchers call it "the hallmark of interpersonal communication skills" (Hullman, 2015). As an example, one study (Stephens et al., 2009) found that professors negatively appraised students who sent emails that included casual text language (such as "4" instead of "for" or "RU" instead of "are you"). These students didn't adapt their message to an appropriate level of professional formality. Later in this chapter, we'll discuss how choosing the right channel for particular messages and recipients is also an important component of communication adaptability.

Adaptability becomes challenging when communicating masspersonally. When you post on social media, for instance, it's likely you have multiple audiences in mind as you craft your message (Marder et al., 2016). If you've edited an update before posting because you knew how some followers would react, you've practiced adaptability—and also self-presentation, as described in Chapter 3.

Ability to Perform Skillfully

Once you have chosen the appropriate way to communicate, you have to perform that behavior effectively (Barge & Little, 2008). In communication, as in other activities, practice is the key to skillful performance. Much of the information in *Interplay* will introduce you to new tools for communicating, and the activities at the end of each chapter will help you practice them.

Media Clip

Pathologically Competent: *House of Cards*

In the TV series *House of Cards*, career politician Frank Underwood (Kevin Spacey) and his equally ambitious wife Claire (Robin Wright) are ruthless in their pursuit of power. They make friends, curry favor, and use people to further their own positions.

In terms of communication competence, Claire and Frank are very effective in achieving their personal goals. They are strategic self-monitors, carefully noting how others respond to them and adjusting accordingly. But interpersonally, they regard other people only as tools to achieve their selfish goals, or as enemies to be defeated. Not surprisingly, the Underwoods have no close relationships. In an aside to the camera, Frank says: "For those of us climbing to the top of the food chain, there can be no mercy. There is but one rule: Hunt or be hunted."

Most of us would regard Frank and Claire's heartless obsession with power as pathological. We recognize that to be fully competent communicators—and healthy human beings—it's necessary to be both effective *and* appropriate.

Empathy/Perspective Taking

We develop the most effective messages when we understand and empathize with the other person's point of view (Nelson et al., 2017). Empathy, or perspective taking (explained in Chapter 4), is an essential skill partly because others may not express their thoughts and feelings clearly. And of course, it's not enough just to imagine another's perspective; it's vital to *communicate* that understanding through verbal and nonverbal responses (Kellas et al., 2013).

Cognitive Complexity

Cognitive complexity is the ability to construct a variety of different frameworks for viewing an issue. Imagine that a longtime friend never responded to a message from you, but you expected a response. One possible explanation is that your friend is offended by something you've done. Another possibility is that something has happened in another part of your friend's life that is upsetting. Or perhaps nothing at all is wrong, and you're just being overly sensitive.

Researchers have found that a large number of constructs for interpreting the behavior of others leads to greater "conversational sensitivity," increasing the chances of acting in ways that will produce satisfying results (Burleson, 2011; MacGeorge & Wilkum, 2012). Not surprisingly, research also shows a connection between cognitive complexity and empathy (Joireman, 2004). The relationship makes sense: The more ways you have to understand others and interpret their behaviors, the greater the likelihood that you can see and communicate about the world from their perspective.

Self-Monitoring

Psychologists use the term **self-monitoring** to describe the process of paying close attention to one's own behavior and using these observations to shape it. Self-monitors are able to consider their behavior from a detached viewpoint, allowing for observations such as:

"I'm making a fool out of myself."
"I'd better speak up now."
"This approach is working well. I'll keep it up."

It's no surprise that self-monitoring generally increases one's effectiveness as a communicator (Day et al., 2002). The President's Council of Economic Advisers maintains that greater "self-awareness, self-monitoring, and self-control" will help students be more successful when they enter the job market (Executive Office of the President, 2009, p. 10). The ability to ask "How am I doing?"—and to change your behavior if the answer isn't positive—is a tremendous asset for communicators.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Until a few decades ago, face-to-face communication was essential to starting and maintaining most, if not all, interpersonal relationships. Other channels existed—primarily the telephone and postal correspondence—but most interpersonal communication seemed to require physical proximity.

Now things are different. Obviously, face-to-face communication is still vitally important, but now technology also plays a key role in starting and maintaining relationships. **Social media** is the term that describes all the communication channels that allow community-based input, interaction, content sharing, and collaboration. Defined broadly, you're using social media when you send text messages, post a tweet, exchange emails and instant messages, or use social networking sites such as Facebook and Instagram. The number of social media technologies has exploded in the past few decades, giving communicators today an array of choices that would have amazed someone from a previous era.

Before reading about the characteristics of social media, take a moment to analyze the role of digital communication in your life by completing the assessment on page 24.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

In many ways, mediated and face-to-face communication are similar. They involve messages, channels, noise, and other elements of the transactional model. Both are used to satisfy the physical, identity, social, and practical needs outlined on pages 5–9.

ASSESSING YOUR COMMUNICATION

Your Use of Social Media

Respond to each of the 15 items below according to how closely it describes you, using a scale from 1 through 8, with 1 = "not at all descriptive of me," and 8 = "highly descriptive of me."

_____ **1.** I prefer online social interaction over face-to-face communication.

_____ **2.** Online social interaction is more comfortable for me than face-to-face interaction.

_____ **3.** I prefer communicating with people online rather than face to face.

_____ **4.** I have used the internet to talk with others when I was feeling isolated.

_____ **5.** I have used the internet to make myself feel better when I was down.

_____ **6.** I have used the internet to make myself feel better when I've felt upset.

_____ **7.** When I haven't been online for some time, I become preoccupied with the thought of going online.

_____ **8.** I would feel lost if I were unable to go online.

_____ **9.** I think obsessively about going online when I am offline.

_____ **10.** I have difficulty controlling the amount of time I spend online.

_____ **11.** I find it difficult to control my internet use.

_____ **12.** When offline, I have a hard time trying to resist the urge to go online.

_____ **13.** My internet use has made it difficult for me to manage my life.

_____ **14.** I have missed social engagements or activities because of my internet use.

_____ **15.** My internet use has created problems in my life.

Source: Caplan, S. E. (2010). Theory and measurement of generalized problematic Internet use: A two-step approach. *Computers in Human Behavior, 26*, 1089–1097.

For scoring information, see page 35 at the end of the chapter.

Despite these similarities, communication by social media differs from the in-person variety in some important ways. Table 1.1 provides an overview of differences by communication channel. It shows that each channel has both advantages and drawbacks. You can boost your effectiveness by choosing the channel that's right for each situation. Should you send a message via a text? Make a phone call? Wait for a chance to talk in person? It depends on the nature of the message, the receiver, and the situation.

TABLE 1.1 Characteristics of Communication Channels

	Synchronization	Richness/Leanness	Permanence
Face-to-Face	Synchronous	Rich	Low
Video Chat	Synchronous	Moderately rich	Low
Telephone	Synchronous	Moderately lean (voice but no visuals)	Low
Voice Mail	Asynchronous	Moderately lean (voice but no visuals)	Moderate (can be stored; typically deleted)
Text/Instant Messaging	Asynchronous (but potentially quick)	Lean	Moderate (can be stored; typically deleted; some self-erase)
Email	Asynchronous	Lean	High (often stored; often shared with others)
Social Networking Sites	Typically asynchronous	Lean (but can include photos, videos)	High (and very public)

Leanness

Social scientists use the term **richness** to describe the abundance of nonverbal cues that add clarity to a verbal message (Otondo et al., 2008). Conversely, **leanness** describes messages that carry less information due to a lack of nonverbal cues. As you'll read in Chapter 6, face-to-face communication abounds with nonverbal messages that give communicators information about the meanings of one another's words. By comparison, most social media are much leaner. (See Figure 1.4.)

To appreciate how message leanness varies by medium, imagine you haven't heard from a friend in several weeks and you decide to ask, "Is anything wrong?" Your friend replies, "No, I'm fine." Would that response be more or less descriptive depending on whether you received it via text message, over the phone, or in person?

You almost certainly would be able to tell a great deal more from a face-to-face response because it would contain a richer array of cues, such

FIGURE 1.4 Leanness–Richness Spectrum of Communication Channels

as facial expressions and vocal tone. By contrast, a text message is lean because it contains only words. A voice message—containing vocal cues but no visual ones—would probably fall somewhere in between.

Because most mediated messages are leaner than the face-to-face variety, they can be harder to interpret with confidence. Irony and attempts at humor can easily be misunderstood, so as a receiver it's important to clarify your interpretations before jumping to conclusions. Adding phrases such as "just kidding" or an emoji like 😄 can help your lean messages become richer, but your sincerity could still be interpreted as sarcasm. As a sender, think about how to send unambiguous messages so you aren't misunderstood.

The leanness of social media messages presents another challenge. Without nonverbal cues, online communicators can create idealized—and sometimes unrealistic—images of one another. As you'll read in Chapters 3 and 6, the absence of nonverbal cues allows communicators to manage their identities carefully. After all, it's a world without bad breath, unsightly blemishes, or stammering responses. Such conditions encourage participants to engage in what Joseph Walther (2007) calls **hyperpersonal communication**, accelerating the discussion of personal topics and relational development beyond what normally happens in face-to-face interaction. Research shows that online communicators self-disclose at higher rates and share more emotions than they would in person, often leading to a hastened (and perhaps premature) sense of relational intimacy (Jiang et al., 2011). This accelerated disclosure may explain why communicators who meet online sometimes have difficulty shifting to a face-to-face relationship (McEwan & Zanolla, 2013).

It's important to remember that richer doesn't always mean better. There are times when a lean message is the best route to take. Maybe you don't want the other person to hear the quiver in your voice, see the sweat on your forehead, or notice the clothing you're wearing. Moreover, lean messages communicate less information about communicators' personal features. One study found that the text-only format of most online messages can bring people closer by minimizing the perception of differences due to gender, social class, race or ethnicity, and age (Rains & Tsetsi, 2017). When you want people to focus on what you're saying rather than your appearance, leaner communication can be advantageous.

Comedian Aziz Ansari notes that younger people are typically averse to synchronous phone conversations. ***Which communication channels do you prefer? Why?***

Asynchronicity

As you read earlier, **asynchronous communication** occurs when there's a time gap between when a message is sent and when it's received. By contrast, **synchronous communication** is two-way and occurs in real time. In-person communication is synchronous, as are phone conversations and communication via video tools such as FaceTime and Skype. By contrast, email and voice mail messages are asynchronous. So are "snail mail" letters, tweets, and text messages.

The asynchronous nature of most mediated messages makes them fundamentally different from synchronous communication. Most obviously, asynchronous messages give you the choice of not responding at all: You can ignore most problematic text messages without much fallout. That isn't a good option if the person who wants an answer gets you on the phone or confronts you in person.

Even if you want to respond, asynchronous media give you the chance to edit your reply. You can mull over different wording, or even ask others for advice about what to say. On the other hand, delaying a response to an asynchronous message can send a message of its own, intentionally or not ("I wonder why she hasn't texted me back?").

Permanence

What happens in a face-to-face conversation is transitory. By contrast, text and video can be stored indefinitely and forwarded to others. The

FOCUS ON RESEARCH

Sidestepping Permanence: The Attraction of Snapchat

Most of your emails, text messages, and posts are permanent and can be archived. But some instant messaging services are *ephemeral*—that is, their messages disappear after a short period of time. Scholars want to know more about the most popular ephemeral platform: Snapchat.

Joseph Bayer and his research team conducted surveys and in-depth interviews with Snapchat users. They concluded that Snapchat is a "lightweight channel" for sharing spontaneous experiences with friends and family. Snapchatters feel free to express themselves without worrying how their messages look and sound, because they know those messages will disappear. As a result, the respondents said that Snapchat is more enjoyable and puts them in a more positive mood than other digital platforms.

A study by Sonja Utz and her colleagues painted a less rosy picture of ephemeral messaging. Respondents said that, compared with their Facebook posting, they were more likely to use Snapchat for "flirting and finding new love interests." As a result, Snapchat elicits more partner jealousy than does Facebook. About half the respondents said

they had sent drunk photos via Snapchat—and between 13 percent and 20 percent admitted sending snaps involving sexting or "legally questionable activities."

One theme held true across both studies: The ephemeral nature of Snapchat affords less inhibited communication than occurs through more permanent channels.

Bayer, J. B., Ellison, N. B., Schoenebeck, S. Y., & Falk, E. B. (2016). Sharing the small moments: Ephemeral social interaction on Snapchat. *Information, Communication & Society, 19,* 956–977.

Utz, S., Muscanell, N., & Khalid, C. (2015). Snapchat elicits more jealousy than Facebook: A comparison of Snapchat and Facebook use. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 18,* 141–146.

permanence of digital messages can be a plus (Ozkul & Humphreys, 2015). For instance, you can save and share the smartphone photos of your once-in-a-lifetime encounter with a celebrity. And if your boss emails you saying it's okay to come in late on Monday morning, you're covered if she later complains about your tardy arrival.

There can also be a downside to the enduring nature of digital messages. It's bad enough to blurt out a private thought or lash out in person, but at least there's no permanent record of your indiscretion. By contrast, a regrettable text message, email, or web posting can be archived virtually forever. Even worse, it can be retrieved and forwarded in nightmarish ways. The best advice, then, is to take the same approach with mediated messages that you do in person: Think twice before saying something you might later regret. As one writer put it, "Old email never dies" (Bennehum, 2005).

Always being connected extends social networks, but the downside can be a lack of quality face time. ***What are the pros and cons of your social media use?***

Some mediated platforms are designed to thwart message permanence. Snapchat is the most popular of these time-limited instant messaging services (Piwek & Joinson, 2016), with content typically disappearing within 10 seconds. The Focus on Research sidebar in this section describes why communicators opt for Snapchat in some of their interpersonal exchanges.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND RELATIONAL QUALITY

At first glance, social media might seem inferior to face-to-face interaction. As you've already read, it lacks the rich array of nonverbal cues that are available in person. One observer put it this way: "Email is a way to stay in touch, but you can't share a coffee or a beer with somebody on email or give them a hug" (Nie & Erbring, 2000, p. 19). It's no surprise that researchers have found a connection between relational satisfaction and the use of rich communication channels (Goodman-Deane et al., 2016), particularly meeting with others in person.

"Cyberpessimists" argue that there's a dark side to relying on mediated channels (for a review, see DeAndrea et al., 2010). Some critics describe how the almost hypnotic attraction of an internet connection discourages a sense of community (e.g., Putnam, 2000). Others claim that the "always on" nature of today's communication technology leads to more superficial relationships (Turkle, 2011, 2015). One study found that the mere presence of mobile devices can have a negative effect on closeness, connection, and conversation quality during face-to-face discussions of personal topics (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2013; see also Allred & Crowley, 2017). That's

why some groups begin business meetings or social events by depositing their cell phones at the door, so as not to disrupt their in-person interaction.

Despite these legitimate concerns, research also suggests that communicating and relating via social media can be satisfying (Walther & Ramirez, 2010). One survey revealed that social networking sites usually don't replace offline relationships as much as enhance and extend them (Kujath, 2011). Here are some research findings supporting the value of communicating via digital media:

- Social networking sites provide the opportunity to develop and maintain social connectedness, and that connectedness is associated with lower depression and anxiety and greater life satisfaction (Grieve et al., 2013).
- Participants who have both in-person and digital contact with friends are less lonely than their counterparts who have fewer ways of keeping in touch (Baiocco et al., 2011).
- College students use social media and smartphones to help meet their need to belong to a group (Yonghwan et al., 2016).
- Dating couples report that staying in touch throughout the day via texting and social media helps build relational intimacy—even if the conversation is only about routine and mundane topics (Boyle & O'Sullivan, 2016).

There are several reasons why mediated channels can increase both the amount and quality of interpersonal communication (Barnes, 2003). For one thing, they make communication easier. Busy schedules and long distances can make face-to-face contact difficult or impossible. The challenge of finding time is especially tough for people who are separated by long distances and multiple time zones (Dainton & Aylor, 2002). In relationships like this, the asynchronous nature of most social media provides a way to share information. And as you read earlier, lean messages can strip away some of the factors that complicate interpersonal communication. That's why internet experts call social media tools "low-friction opportunities" to create, maintain, and rediscover social ties in our lives (Anderson, 2010).

Findings such as these help explain why Steve Jobs, the cofounder of Apple Computer, suggested that personal computers be renamed "*interpersonal* computers."

COMMUNICATING COMPETENTLY WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

Like face-to-face communication, mediated interaction can seem natural and almost effortless. But despite its apparent ease, there's potential for trouble unless you proceed mindfully. The following guidelines will help.

Be Careful What You Post

A quick scan of social networking home pages shows that many users post text and images about themselves that could prove embarrassing in some contexts: "Here I am just before my DUI arrest"; "This is me in Cancun on spring break." This is not the sort of information most people would be eager to show a prospective employer or certain family members.

As a cautionary tale about how your digital blunders can haunt you, consider the case of Kevin Colvin, a young intern at a Boston bank. He emailed his boss to say "something came up at home" and he would need to miss a few days of work. But his boss searched Facebook and discovered a photo showing that Kevin was actually attending an out-of-town Halloween party, where he was in a fairy costume, complete with wings and wand. Kevin found that his indiscretion was not a brilliant career move. (To see the photo and read the boss's reaction, type the words "Kevin" and "cool wand" into your browser.)

Some incautious posts can go beyond being simply amusing. One example is the practice of "sexting"—sharing explicit photos of one's self or others via mediated channels. One survey revealed that a third of the respondents had sent a sexting image while in high school using a cell phone (Martinez-Prather & Vandiver, 2014). In another study, nearly two-thirds of the more than 1,600 college freshmen surveyed said they had sent sexually suggestive texts or photos (Winkelman et al., 2014). Even more disturbing, 31 percent shared these private communications with a third party. The impulsive message or post that seems harmless at the time can haunt you for a lifetime.

Be Considerate

The word *etiquette* calls to mind old-fashioned rules. But whatever you call them, mostly unspoken rules of conduct still keep society running smoothly. Communication by social media calls for its own rules and competencies (Tolman, 2011), which some refer to as *netiquette*. Here are a few.

Respect Others' Need for Undivided Attention You might not realize that some people are insulted when you divide your attention between your in-person conversational partner and distant contacts. As one observer put it, "While a quick log-on may seem, to the user, a harmless break, others in the room receive it as a silent dismissal. It announces: 'I'm not interested'" (Bauerlein, 2009).

In Chapter 7, we have plenty to say about the challenges of listening effectively when you are multitasking. Even if you think you can understand others while dealing with communication media, it's important to realize that they may perceive you as being rude.

"It keeps me from looking at my phone every two seconds."

Keep Your Tone Civil If you've ever posted a snide comment on a blog, shot back a nasty reply to a text or instant message, or forwarded an embarrassing email, you know that it's easier to behave badly when the target of your message isn't right in front of you. (See the Watch and Discuss video in this section.) And it's even easier to be nasty when your comments are posted anonymously (Rowe, 2015).

The tendency to transmit messages without considering their consequences is called

disinhibition, and research shows it is more likely in mediated channels than in face-to-face contact (Casale et al., 2015; Hollenbaugh & Everett, 2013). Sometimes communicators take disinhibition to the extreme, blasting off angry—even vicious—emails, text messages, and blog posts. The common term for these outbursts is *flaming* (Hmielowski et al., 2014). In text-based forms of social media, flaming includes profanity, all-capital letters, excessive exclamation points, and question marks. Here is the account of one writer who was the target of an obscenity-filled email:

> No one had ever said something like this to me before, and no one could have said this to me before: In any other medium, these words would be, literally, unspeakable. The guy couldn't have said this to me on the phone, because I would have hung up and not answered if the phone rang again, and he couldn't have said it to my face, because I wouldn't have let him finish. . . . I suppose the guy could have written me a nasty letter: He probably wouldn't have used the word "rectum," though, and he probably wouldn't have mailed the letter; he would have thought twice while he was addressing the envelope. But the nature of email is that you don't think twice. You write and send. (Seabrook, 1994, p. 71)

In some online communities, flaming is part of the culture, and is a way to instruct or correct a member who has misstated facts or abused the group's rules. But in most contexts, it's hard to find a justification for flaming.

Flaming isn't the only type of mediated harassment. Cyberbullying has become a widespread phenomenon, often with dire consequences (Holfeld & Grabe, 2012). More than 4 in 10 teens report being the target of online harassment—and the problem is international in scope (Huang & Chou, 2010). Targets of cyberbullying often feel helpless and scared, to such a degree that they are eight times more likely to carry a weapon to school than other students. Several cases have been reported in the United States in which victims of cyberbullying took their own lives (Baumanet al., 2013), which is sobering in light of reports that 81 percent of cyberbullies admit their only reason for bullying is because "it's funny" (National Crime Prevention Council, 2007). See the Dark Side box in Chapter 12 for more discussion of this serious problem.

One way to behave better in asynchronous situations is to ask yourself a simple question before you send, post, or broadcast: Would you deliver the same message to the recipient in person? If your answer is no, then you might want to think twice before sending.

Be Mindful of Bystanders Sometimes the use of communication technology annoys others in public spaces. For example, you might have encountered restaurant patrons whose phone voices intruded on your conversation, pedestrians who bumped into you because they were looking at their phones, or store customers talking on their phones while holding up a checkout line. If this sort of behavior doesn't bother you, it can be hard to feel sympathetic with others who are offended by it. Nonetheless, this is a situation in which the "platinum rule" applies: Consider treating others the way they would like to be treated.

Watch and Discuss

Look up and watch "Men Read Mean Tweets to Female Sports Reporters."

1) Consider the roles of *leanness* and *disinhibition* in Twitter communication.
2) Discuss guidelines for civil use of social media.

Balance Mediated and Face Time Being connected 24/7 can steal time from in-person communication, but research supports the continuing importance of face time (Vitak et al., 2011). In fact, in-person (as opposed to online) interaction is a larger contributor to longevity and happiness than either diet or exercise (Pinker, 2014).

Overuse of social media can range from slightly abnormal to borderline obsessive. For instance, online gaming—especially intensive role-playing games—can decrease the relational satisfaction of marriage partners (Ahlstrom et al., 2012). And as noted in the Dark Side box on p. 7, overuse of online communication (to the exclusion of the in-person variety) can lead to loneliness and other negative consequences (Kuss et al., 2013).

So what is the happy medium? There's no simple answer, but there are a couple of tests to keep in mind. If your loved ones hint—or directly tell you—that they would like more face time with you, it's probably wise to heed their request. And if you find that technological devices are subtracting from, rather than adding to, your interpersonal relationships, it might be time to monitor and limit your use of social media.

Embrace Multimodality

Each of us has preferred modes of communication. Sometimes age plays a role in those preferences. For instance, younger people generally prefer texting to phone conversations (Hyman, 2014), often viewing the latter as annoying and even intrusive (Anderson, 2015). And younger communicators are more likely than older ones to use social networking sites, although the gap isn't as large as it used to be (Smith, 2014).

But relying on one or two modes of communication to the exclusion of others may cut off interactions with those who don't share your channel preferences. You no doubt have heard or said, "Why didn't you respond to my (text, e-message, voicemail, post)?" only to have the other person say, "Oh, I rarely check that." That's why communication scholars endorse **multimodality**: the ability and willingness to use multiple channels of communication (Chan, 2015). To return to an analogy from our discussion of competence, multimodal communicators are like talented chefs who use a variety of spices rather than just salt to season their dishes.

In a study of communication practices among first-year college students, a research team found that the respondents embraced multimodality (Morreale et al., 2015). The surveyed students said they typically text with friends, phone their families, and use email when contacting instructors. They also said they would break up with a romantic partner in person rather than through digital media, and that they generally prefer face-to-face over mediated communication.

It's wise to analyze your audience and adapt to their channel preferences before communicating. In your analysis, consider not only demographic variables such as age, but also message content. As a rule of thumb, more serious and complex topics demand richer channels, such as face-to-face communication (Eden & Veksler, 2016). Texting and instant messaging are fine for updates and making plans, but personal and substantive conversations are best handled in person, or at least over the phone.

And remember that most mediated communication in the workplace still takes place via email, phone, and voicemail (Giang, 2013; Wayne, 2014). Attempting to communicate professionally via texting or social media could be a breach of professional etiquette.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Objective 1.1 Recognize the needs that communication satisfies.

Communication is important for a variety of reasons. Besides satisfying practical needs, meaningful communication contributes to physical health, plays a major role in defining our identity, and forms the basis for our social relationships.

Q: Using a representative two-day period, identify the needs you try to satisfy by communicating. How could you better meet those needs by improving your communication skills?

Objective 1.2 Explain the interpersonal communication process: its transactional nature, governing principles, and characteristics.

Communication is a complex process. The transactional model presented in this chapter shows that meanings are determined by the people who exchange messages, not in the messages themselves. Interpersonal communicators usually send and receive messages simultaneously, particularly in face-to-face exchanges. Environment and noise affect the nature of interaction, as do the channels used to exchange messages.

Communication follows several principles. For instance, it is transactional, irreversible, and unrepeatable, and it can be intentional or unintentional. Messages also have both content and relational dimensions.

Communication in interpersonal relationships is distinguished by uniqueness, interdependence, disclosure, and intrinsic rewards. Interpersonal communication is best understood in contrast to impersonal communication.

To understand the communication process, it is important to recognize and avoid several common misconceptions. More communication is not always better. Sometimes total understanding isn't as important as we might think. Even at its best, communication is not a panacea that will solve every problem. Effective communication is not a natural ability. Although some people have greater aptitude at communicating, everyone can learn to interact with others more competently.

Q: Apply the transactional model to a situation that illustrates the qualities of interpersonal communication described on pages 15–16.

Objective 1.3 Identify characteristics of effective communication and competent communicators.

Communication competency is the ability to be both effective and appropriate. There is no single ideal way to communicate. Flexibility and adaptability are characteristics of competent communicators, as are skill at performing behaviors, empathy and perspective taking, cognitive complexity, and self-monitoring. The good news is, communication competency can be learned.

Q: Identify interpersonal situations in which you communicate competently and those in which your competence is less than satisfactory. (Consider inviting people who know you well to help with this process.) Based on these observations, identify goals for improving your interpersonal communication skills.

Objective 1.4 Describe the advantages and drawbacks of various social media communication channels in relation to face-to-face communication.

Social media differ from the face-to-face variety in several noteworthy ways: They are typically leaner, often asynchronous, and can be permanent. Social media do pose risks for relationships; but when used mindfully, they can enhance them. This chapter offers several guidelines for using social media with due caution and consideration.

Q: Evaluate the optimal level of social media use in your relationships. What are some ways you can increase your competence level when using social media?

KEY TERMS

Asynchronous communication (26)
Channel (12)
Cognitive complexity (22)
Communication (9)
Communication competence (19)
Content dimension (of a message) (14)
Disinhibition (31)
Environment (11)
Feedback (10)
Hyperpersonal communication (26)
Interpersonal communication (15)
Leanness (25)
Masspersonal communication (17)
Mediated communication (12)
Multimodality (32)
Noise (external, physiological, and psychological) (11)
Relational dimension (of a message) (14)
Richness (25)
Self-monitoring (23)
Social media (23)
Synchronous communication (26)
Transactional communication (10)

ACTIVITIES

1. As you read in this chapter, communication satisfies a variety of physical, identity, and social needs. With a group of classmates, evaluate how well social media enable you to address those needs compared with face-to-face communication.

2. Select three important relationships in your life. These might include your relationships with people at work or school, or with friends and family. For each relationship, rate on a scale ranging from 1 to 10 (with 1 = low and 10 = high) the degree to which the relationship is characterized by each of these four factors: *uniqueness*, *interdependence*, *self-disclosure*, and *intrinsic rewards*. Share your analysis with a classmate and discuss what these factors say about the interpersonal nature of your relationships.

3. How competent are you as a communicator? You can begin to answer this question by interviewing people who know you well: a family member, friend, or fellow worker, for example. Interview different people to determine if you are more competent in some relationships than others, or in some situations than others.

a. Describe the characteristics of competent communicators outlined in this chapter. Be sure your interviewee understands each of them.

b. Ask your interviewee to rate you on each of the observable qualities. (It won't be possible for others to evaluate internal characteristics, such as cognitive complexity and self-monitoring.) Be sure this evaluation reflects your communication in a variety of situations: It's likely you aren't uniformly competent—or incompetent—in all of them.

c. If your rating is not high in one or more areas, discuss with your partner how you could raise it.

4. Knowing how you want to communicate isn't the same as being able to perform competently. The technique of behavior rehearsal provides a way to improve a particular communication skill before you use it in real life. Behavior rehearsal consists of four steps:

a. Define your goal. Begin by identifying the way you want to behave.

b. On your own or with the help of classmates, break the goal into the behaviors it involves. Most goals are made up of several verbal and nonverbal parts. You may be able to identify these parts by thinking about them yourself, by observing others, by reading about them, or by asking others for advice.

c. Practice each behavior before using it in real life. First, imagine yourself behaving more competently. Next, practice a new behavior by rehearsing it with others.

d. Try out the behavior in real life. You can increase the odds of success if you follow two pieces of advice when trying out new communication behaviors: Work on only one subskill at a time, and start with easy situations. Don't expect yourself suddenly to behave flawlessly in the most challenging situations. Begin by practicing your new skills in situations in which you have a chance of success.

5. Construct a diary of the ways you use social media in a three-day period. For each instance when you use social media (email, social networking website, phone, Twitter, etc.), describe

a. The kind(s) of social media you use

b. The nature of the communication (e.g., "Wrote on friend's Facebook wall," "Texted roommate to pick up dinner on the way home")

c. The reason you chose that medium for that particular message

Share your findings with your classmates. Describe the types of media you use most often and why you chose them. Do you think some of your messages could have been more effective if you had used a different medium? Are you a multimodal communicator, or do you tend to prefer one communication medium over others?

SCORING FOR ASSESSING YOUR COMMUNICATION (PAGE 24)

Add your responses to 1 through 15. The total is your "Generalized Problematic Internet Use" score—a measure of how social media may have negative outcomes for you. The average person scores about 33, within a possible range of 15 to 120. Did you score higher or lower? A score of 69 or higher may indicate problematic use. As you consider your score, think about the role social media play in your relationships: Are you more interested in interacting with friends via social media than in person? Do you go online to feel better? Do you find your internet use interfering with other activities? Strive for balance in integrating social media into your life.

2

Culture and Interpersonal Communication

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

2.1 Explain the relationship between intercultural and interpersonal dimensions of communication.

2.2 Describe five key values that help shape a culture's communication norms.

2.3 Recognize the range of co-cultures in today's society and how co-cultural factors can affect interpersonal communication.

2.4 Explain the factors that shape a culture's verbal and nonverbal codes.

2.5 Identify the attitudes, knowledge, and skills required for intercultural communication competence.

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MORE THAN A HALF-CENTURY AGO, theorist Marshall McLuhan (1962) coined the metaphor of the world as a "global village," in which communication technology connects members of every nation. McLuhan suggested that, just like in a traditional village, our affairs are intertwined—for better or worse. This analysis has proven to be increasingly accurate.

Thanks to the growth in communication technology, commerce has changed in ways that would have been unimaginable just a generation ago. International telephone service is affordable and efficient. The internet allows users around the world to share information with one another instantaneously, and members of global organizations can meet in virtual teams.

Beyond technology, demographic changes are transforming our society. Countries such as the United States are in some ways microcosms of the global village, in that immigration has made society more multicultural and multiethnic than ever before (see Figure 2.1). In this chapter, we explore how interpersonal communication operates in a networked world where members of different cultures interact.

CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION

Before going any further, we need to clarify two important concepts: *culture* and *intercultural communication*. We also need to explain how intercultural and interpersonal dimensions interact.

FIGURE 2.1 U.S. Immigrant Population by World Region of Birth, 1960–2015

Data from Migration Policy Institute, 2015

CULTURE AND CO-CULTURE

Defining culture isn't an easy task, as scholars acknowledge (Faulkner et al., 2006). For our purposes, Larry Samovar and his colleagues (2007) offer a clear and comprehensive definition of **culture**: "the language, values, beliefs, traditions, and customs people share and learn."

This definition shows that culture is, to a great extent, a matter of *perception* and *definition*. When you identify yourself as a member of a culture, you must (a) recognize yourself and others as sharing certain characteristics and (b) see others who don't possess these characteristics as members of different categories. For example, eye color doesn't seem like a significant factor in distinguishing "us" from "them," whereas skin color has come to play a more important role in society, at least in some cases. But it's not hard to imagine a society where the opposite is true (look up Jane Elliott's famous "blue-eye/brown-eye" experiment).

Social scientists use the label **in-groups** to describe groups with whom we identify and **out-groups** to describe those we view as different (Caughron et al., 2013). Cultural membership contributes to every person's **social identity**—the part of the self-concept that is based on membership in groups. Your answer to the question "Who are you?" might include social categories such as your ethnicity and nationality.

Social scientists use the term **co-culture** to describe the perception of membership in a group that is part of an encompassing culture (Fox & Warber, 2015; Orbe & Spellers, 2005). Co-cultures in North American society include categories based on a number of factors, including

- age (e.g., teens, senior citizens)
- race/ethnicity (e.g., African American, Latino)
- sexual orientation (e.g., LGBTQ, straight)
- nationality (e.g., immigrants or expatriates from particular countries)
- geographic region (e.g., Southerners, Midwesterners)
- physical disability (e.g., wheelchair users, persons who are blind)
- religion (e.g., Mormon, Muslim)
- activity (e.g., biker, gamer)

Members of co-cultures develop unique patterns of communication and connection. Deaf culture is a good example: The shared experiences of deafness can create strong bonds, and signing offers a shared language. There are Deaf schools, Deaf competitions (e.g., Miss Deaf America), Deaf performing arts (including Deaf comedians), and other organizations that bring Deaf people together. Of course, the connection experienced by members of this co-culture can create challenges when communicating with those outside the group—for instance, between Deaf children and their hearing parents (Miller, 2010).

Media Clip

Embracing Tradition and Change: *Meet the Patels*

It's time for 29-year-old Ravi Patel to get married. At least that's what his parents think, as they make clear throughout *Meet the Patels*. Filmed by his sister, Geeta, this warmhearted documentary chronicles Ravi's attempts to find an Indian bride—for his own sake, and also to please his mother, father, and the extended Patel family.

Ravi has good reason to follow in his parents' footsteps. They've been happily married for more than 30 years, and an arranged Indian marriage certainly worked for them.

Unbeknownst to his mother and father, Ravi had been dating a non-Indian woman for two years. With that relationship ended, he makes a 12-month commitment to follow the traditional practice of Indian matchmaking. His search includes a visit to the Patels' ancestral hometown in India and a whirlwind North American dating tour. His parents are involved every step of the way, making suggestions, offering pep talks, and vetting candidates.

In his search for a soulmate, Ravi struggles to embrace his heritage while living as a millennial in 21st-century America. His journey is made more bearable thanks to a healthy sense of humor, familial love, and mutual respect.

Regional co-cultures also have distinctive communication patterns. Researchers have uncovered significant state-by-state variations (Rentfrow, 2014), reporting that

> the country broke down into three macro regions: New England and the Mid-Atlantic states, which the researchers termed "temperamental and uninhibited"; the South and Midwest, which were labeled "friendly and conventional"; and the West Coast, Rocky Mountains, and Sun Belt, described as "relaxed and creative." (Kluger & Wilson, 2013)

And true to an enduring stereotype, people from New York City are typically more assertive than those from the Upper Midwest (Sigler et al., 2008). Given these differences, a first-year college student from Iowa might regard a new roommate from "The Big Apple" as pushy and unpredictable, while the Northeasterner might view the Midwesterner as placid and unadventurous.

Membership in co-cultures can be a source of enrichment and pride. But there are often tensions between identifying with one group and fitting into the culture at large. For example, focus groups revealed that African American students in predominantly white universities struggled to be proud of their cultural heritage while also trying to adapt to the "whiteness of their schools" (Simmons et al., 2013). On one hand, they wanted to share cultural insights with white students, but they were reluctant to call attention to themselves.

In addition, members of some co-cultural groups face exclusion and discrimination related to this identity. For instance, Patrice Buzzanell (1999) describes how members of underrepresented groups are disadvantaged in employment interviews, where the rules are established by the dominant culture. Studies of Jamaican children (Ferguson & Cramer, 2007) and Latino children (Golash-Boza & Darity, 2008) indicate that skin color influences self-identification and self-esteem.

In other cases, co-cultures voluntarily embrace the chance to distinguish themselves from society at large—such as teens creating slang that only their in-group understands. Some scholars (e.g., Kimmel, 2008; Wood, 2013) have even characterized men and women as belonging to different co-cultures because their communication styles are distinct. As you read this chapter, you will notice that many of the communication challenges that arise between members of different cultures also operate when people from different co-cultures interact.

In today's connected world, communication between members of different cultures and co-cultures is common. ***What intercultural encounters do you experience? What challenges and rewards have such encounters provided?***

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Having defined culture, we can go on to define **intercultural communication** as the process that occurs when members of two or more cultures or co-cultures exchange messages in a manner that is influenced by their different cultural perceptions and symbol systems, both verbal and nonverbal (Samovar et al., 2007).

Because all of us belong to many groups (e.g., ethnic, economic, interest-based, age-related), you might be asking yourself whether there is any communication that *isn't* intercultural, or at least co-cultural. The answer to this question is "yes" for two reasons. First, even in an increasingly diverse world, there are still plenty of relationships in which people share a basic common background. Within co-cultural groups such as Irish marchers in a St. Patrick's Day parade, suburban-bred men who play poker on Fridays, and a college sorority or fraternity, members are likely to share fundamentally similar personal histories and, therefore, have similar norms, customs, and values. Second, even when people with different cultural backgrounds communicate, those differences may not be important. David may be a Jewish American whose ancestors came from Eastern Europe, whereas Lisa is a third-generation Japanese American whose parents are practicing Christians. Yet they could create a life together that transcends their differences and that leaves them able to deal comfortably with those differences when they do arise.

Rather than classifying some exchanges as intercultural and others as free from cultural influences, it's more accurate to talk about *degrees* of cultural significance (King et al., 2013). Encounters can fit along a spectrum of "interculturalness." At the "most intercultural" end are situations in which communicators have highly different backgrounds or beliefs. A traveler visiting a new country for the first time with little knowledge of local society is an obvious example. At the "least intercultural" end of the spectrum fall exchanges in which cultural differences are not significant. A student from Los Angeles who attends a small liberal arts college in the Midwest might find life there somewhat different, but the adjustment would be far less difficult than that for the international traveler. In between these extremes falls a whole range of encounters in which culture plays varying roles.

Note that intercultural communication (at least as we'll use that term here) doesn't always occur when people from different cultures interact. The cultural backgrounds, perceptions, and symbol systems of the participants must have a significant impact on the exchange before we can say that culture has made a difference. Social scientists use the term **salience** to describe how much weight we attach to a particular person or phenomenon. Consider a few examples where culture has little or no salience:

- A group of preschool children is playing together in a park. These 3-year-olds don't recognize the fact that their parents may come from different countries, or even that they don't speak the same language. At this point we wouldn't say that intercultural communication is taking place. Only when cultural factors become salient (diet, sharing, or parental discipline, for example) do the children begin to think of one another as different.
- Members of a school basketball team—some Asian, some black, some Latino, and some white—are intent on winning the league championship. During a game, cultural distinctions aren't salient. There's plenty of communication, but it isn't fundamentally intercultural.

Away from their games, however, they might notice some fundamental differences in the way members of each group communicate.

- A husband and wife were raised in homes with different religious traditions. Most of the time their religious heritage makes little difference, and the partners view themselves as a unified couple. Every so often, however—perhaps during religious holidays or when meeting members of each other's family—the different backgrounds are more salient. At those times we can imagine the partners feeling quite different from each other, thinking of themselves as members of separate cultures.

INTERPERSONAL AND INTERCULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF COMMUNICATION

What is the relationship between intercultural and interpersonal communication? William Gudykunst (2005) suggests that we can model interpersonal and intercultural factors on a two-by-two matrix (Figure 2.2). This model shows that some interpersonal transactions (e.g., a conversation between two siblings who have been raised in the same household) have virtually no intercultural elements. Other encounters (such as a traveler from Senegal trying to get directions from a Ukrainian taxi driver in New York City) are almost exclusively intercultural, without the personal dimensions that we have discussed throughout this book.

Still other exchanges—the most interesting ones for our purposes—contain elements of both intercultural and interpersonal communication. This range of encounters is broad in the global village: business people from different backgrounds try to wrap up a deal; health care educators seek effective ways to serve patients from around the world; neighbors from different racial or ethnic backgrounds look for ways to make their streets safer and cleaner; suburban-bred teachers seek common ground with inner-city students—the list seems almost endless.

FIGURE 2.2 Sample Interactions Between Interpersonal and Intercultural Dimensions of Communication

INTERCULTURAL DIFFERENCES AS GENERALIZATIONS

In the following pages, we spell out a variety of ways communication varies from one culture to another. Although these variations can sometimes be significant, it's important to remember that cultural practices aren't *totally* different: People from varied backgrounds often share enough common ground to make relationships work.

Moreover, there are sometimes greater differences *within* cultures than *between* them (Kirkman et al., 2016). Consider the matter of formality as an example: By most measures, U.S. culture is far more casual than many others. But as Figure 2.3 illustrates, there may be common ground between a formal American and a casual member of a formal culture. Furthermore, within every culture, members display a wide range of communication styles. For instance, although most Asian cultures tend to be collectivistic, some members of those cultures might identify themselves as individualists. For these reasons, it's important to remember that generalizations—even when accurate and helpful—don't apply to every member of a group.

FIGURE 2.3 Intercultural Differences and Similarities in Formality

Adapted from Trompenaars, 1994

CULTURAL VALUES AND NORMS

Some cultural influences on communication are obvious. However, some far less visible values and norms can shape how members of cultures think and act (Chung & Rimal, 2016). In this section, we look at five of these subtle yet important factors. Unless communicators are aware of these differences, they may see people from other cultures as unusual—or even offensive. For this reason, it's important to understand that what may seem like odd behavior can come from following a different set of beliefs and unwritten rules.

As you think about the cultural values and norms described here, you may realize that they are not necessarily differences by nationality. In today's increasingly multicultural society, people from different cultural backgrounds are likely to encounter one another at home, in the country they share.

HIGH VERSUS LOW CONTEXT

Anthropologist Edward Hall (1959) identified two distinct ways that members of various cultures deliver messages. A **high-context culture** relies heavily on subtle, often nonverbal cues to maintain social harmony. High-context communicators pay close attention to nonverbal behaviors, the history of relationships, and social rules that govern interactions. By contrast, a **low-context culture** uses language primarily to express thoughts, feelings, and ideas as directly as possible. To low-context communicators, the meaning of a statement lies in the words spoken.

TABLE 2.1 High- Versus Low-Context Communication Cultures

	High Context	Low Context
Representative national cultures	Most Asian, Middle Eastern, Latin American, and Southern European countries	The United States, Canada, and most Northern European countries
How most important information is carried	Contextual cues such as time, place, relationship, and situation	Explicit verbal messages, with less focus on the situational context
What communicators value	Relational harmony, maintained by indirect expression of options	Self-expression, striving to persuade others to accept one's viewpoint
What communicators admire	Ambiguity and the use of silence	Clear, direct speech

Table 2.1 summarizes some key differences in how people from high- and low-context cultures communicate.

Mainstream cultures in the United States, Canada, and Northern Europe fall toward the low-context end of the scale. In these cultures, communicators generally value straight talk and can grow impatient with indirect behaviors such as hinting (Tili & Barker, 2015). By contrast, most Asian and Middle Eastern mainstream cultures fit the high-context pattern and can be offended by the bluntness of low-context communication styles (Yum, 2012).

There are many other examples of communication differences between high- and low-context cultures. One study of online discussions showed that in India (a high-context culture), people use more emoticons and disclose less private information than in Germany (a low-context culture; Pflug, 2011). Another study found that in China (a high-context culture), people favor nonverbal over verbal expressions of appreciation, whereas in the United States (a low-context culture), people use these types of expressions about evenly (Bello et al., 2010). Other research has found that low-context communicators use more competitive and dominating conflict styles, whereas high-context people are more obliging and accommodating (Croucher et al., 2012).

Even websites designed for global audiences reflect differences attributable to whether the country's communication style is high or low context (Usunier & Roulin, 2010). For example, those from low-context countries invite more contact and contain more relationship-related content than websites from high-context countries.

INDIVIDUALISM VERSUS COLLECTIVISM

Some cultures value the individual, whereas others place greater emphasis on the group. Members of an **individualistic culture** view their primary responsibility as helping themselves, whereas communicators in

collectivistic cultures feel loyalties and obligations to in-groups: extended family, the community, or even organizations (Hofstede, 2011). Individualistic cultures also are characterized by self-reliance and competition, whereas members of a collectivistic culture are more attentive to and concerned with the opinions of others. Scholars regard individualism–collectivism as the most fundamental dimension of cultural differences (Nguyen et al., 2010), and also the most likely cause of intercultural misunderstandings (Yang, 2015). Table 2.2 summarizes some differences between individualistic and collectivistic cultures.

Members of individualistic cultures tend to view themselves in terms of what they *do*, whereas people in collectivistic cultures are more likely to define themselves in terms of group membership. For instance, members of several cultures were asked to answer the question "Who am I?" 20 times (DeAngelis, 1992). North Americans were likely to respond by giving details about themselves as individuals ("I am athletic"; "I am short"). By contrast, members of more collectivistic societies—Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, and some South American cultures, for example—more often answered in terms of their relationships with others ("I am a father"; "I am an employee of XYZ Corporation").

The difference between individualistic and collectivistic cultures also shows up in the level of comfort or anxiety communicators feel. In societies where the need to conform is great, there is a higher degree of

TABLE 2.2 The Self in Individualistic Versus Collectivistic Cultures

	Individualistic	**Collectivistic**
Representative national cultures	The United States, Canada, the United Kingdom	Ecuador, Indonesia, Pakistan
View of self in relation to group	Separate and unique individual; should be independent, self-sufficient	Part of extended family or in-group; "we" or group orientation
Care philosophy	Care for self and immediate family before others	Care for extended family before self
Group membership	Many flexible group memberships; friendships based on shared interests and activities	Emphasis on belonging to a very few permanent in-groups, which have a strong influence
What is rewarded	Individual achievement and initiative; individual decision making	Contribution to group goals and well-being; cooperation with in-group members; group decision making
Credit and blame assignment	Individually assigned	Shared by the group
What communicators value	Autonomy, change, youth, individual security, equality	Duty, order, tradition, age, group security, status, and hierarchy

The LEGO Movie illustrates the pros and cons of individualism and collectivism. Whereas the townsfolk value working together cooperatively (singing "Everything is cool when you're part of a team"), Emmet (voiced by Chris Pratt) demonstrates the importance of unique and nonconformist thought and action. ***Where does your cultural orientation fall on the individualism–collectivism spectrum?***

communication apprehension. For example, as a group, residents of China, Korea, and Japan exhibit a significantly higher degree of anxiety about speaking out in public than do members of individualistic cultures such as the United States and Australia (Berry, 2007). It's important to realize that different levels of communication apprehension don't mean that shyness is problematic in some cultures. In fact, just the opposite is true: In these societies, restraint is highly valued. When the goal is to avoid being "the nail that sticks out," it's logical to feel nervous when you make yourself appear different by calling attention your way.

One study looked at how cultural values influence the way parents communicate with their children (Wakefield, 2013). The author found a sharp contrast between American English (AE) and Hong Kong Cantonese (HKC) cultures in parent–child interactions. AE parents, who value individualism, often pose questions to their children and offer them options ("Would you like to say hello to your uncle?"). Collectivist HKC parents typically give directives and expect compliance ("Say hello to your uncle"). These communication patterns are rooted in cultural values. For the collectivist, the goal is to raise children as respectful members of society—and honoring an uncle is mandatory, not optional. For the individualist, the objective is for children to gain autonomy and independence—and an uncle should understand if a child chooses not to say hello. Rather than viewing these differences negatively (AE parents are "indulgent"; HKC parents are "demanding"), it's best to see them as reflections of their cultural value systems.

POWER DISTANCE

The principle that "all men [and women] are created equal," as embodied in the U.S. Declaration of Independence, is so fundamental that most members of democratic societies accept it without question. However, not all cultures share this belief. Some operate on the assumption that certain groups of people (an aristocracy or an economic class, for example) and some institutions (such as a church or the government) have the right to control the lives of individuals. Geert Hofstede (1984, 2011) coined the term **power distance** to describe the degree to which members of a society accept an unequal distribution of power.

Cultures with low power distance believe in minimizing distinctions between various social classes. Rich and poor, educated and uneducated groups may still exist, but in low-power-difference cultures there is a pervasive belief that one person is as valuable as another. Low-power-distance cultures also support the notion that challenging authority is acceptable—even desirable. Members aren't necessarily punished for raising questions about the status quo. According to Hofstede's research, U.S. and Canadian societies have relatively low power distance, although not the lowest in the world. Austria, Denmark, Israel, and New Zealand proved to be the most egalitarian countries. At the other end of the spectrum are countries with

a high degree of power distance: Philippines, Mexico, Venezuela, India, and Singapore.

The degree of power distance in a culture is reflected in key relationships (Santilli & Miller, 2011). Children who are raised in cultures with high power distance are expected to obey their parents and other authority figures to a degree that might astonish most children raised in the United States or Canada. Power automatically comes with age in many countries. For example, the Korean language has separate terms for *older brother*, *oldest brother*, *younger sister*, *youngest sister*, and so on. Parents in cultures with low power distance don't expect the same degree of unquestioning obedience. They are not surprised when children ask "Why?" when presented with a request or demand.

On-the-job communication is different in low- and high-power-distance societies (Zerfass et al., 2016). In countries with higher degrees of power distance, employees have much less input into the way they perform their work. In fact, workers from these cultures are likely to feel apprehensive when given freedom to make their own decisions (Madlock, 2012) or when a more egalitarian boss asks for their opinion. The reverse is true when management from a culture with an egalitarian tradition tries to do business in a country whose workers are used to high power distance. They can be surprised to find that employees do not expect much say in decisions and do not feel unappreciated when they aren't consulted. They may regard dutiful, submissive, respectful employees as lacking initiative and creativity—traits that helped them gain promotions back home. Given these differences, it's easy to understand why multinational companies need to consider fundamental differences in communication values and behavior when they set up shop in a new country.

UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE

The desire to resolve uncertainty seems to be a universal trait (Berger, 1988). That said, cultures have different ways of coping with an unpredictable future. Hofstede (2011) uses the term **uncertainty avoidance** to reflect the levels of discomfort or threat people feel in response to ambiguous situations and how much they try to avoid them. He developed an uncertainty avoidance index (UAI) to measure these levels. His work has shown that residents of some countries (including Singapore, Great Britain, Denmark, Sweden, Hong Kong, and the United States) are less threatened by change and ambiguity than those of others (such as Belgium, Greece, Japan, and Portugal).

Communication patterns can reflect a culture's degree of uncertainty avoidance. In cultures with high uncertainty avoidance, deviant people and ideas are generally considered dangerous, and intolerance and ethnocentrism are high (Cargile & Bolkan, 2013). People in these cultures are especially concerned with security, so they have a strong need for clearly defined rules and regulations. By contrast, people in cultures that are less threatened by the new and unexpected are more likely to tolerate—or even welcome—people who don't fit the norm.

When a North American who is relatively comfortable with change and novelty spends time with someone from a high UAI culture such as Japan, both communicators may find the other behaving in disconcerting ways. The North American may view the Japanese person as rigid and overly controlled, whereas the Japanese person may regard the North American as undisciplined and overly tolerant. On the other hand, if the communicators understand how their cultural conditioning affects their style, they are more likely to understand, and maybe even learn from, the styles of others.

ACHIEVEMENT VERSUS NURTURING

The term **achievement culture** describes societies that place a high value on material success and a focus on the task at hand. By contrast, a **nurturing culture** regards the support of relationships as an especially important goal.

People from achievement versus nurturing cultures voice their opinions in significantly different ways (Hofstede, 2016; van den Bos et al., 2010). In achievement cultures (e.g., the United States)—which emphasize outperforming others—those who see themselves as highly capable feel more empowered to voice their opinions and are satisfied when they can do so. By contrast, in nurturing cultures (e.g., the Netherlands)—which emphasize helping—those who see themselves as *less* capable feel valued as important group members and feel more satisfied when they have the opportunity to voice their opinions.

CO-CULTURES AND COMMUNICATION

Much of how we view ourselves and how we relate to others grows from our cultural and co-cultural identity—the groups with which we identify. Where do you come from? What's your ethnicity? Your sexual orientation? Your age? Your socioeconomic status? These have become increasingly important factors in interpersonal communication in contemporary society.

In the following pages, we look at some—although by no means all—of the factors that help shape our cultural identity and hence the ways we perceive and communicate with others.

RACE AND ETHNICITY

Race is a construct originally created to explain differences between people by ancestry. But as modern scientists explain, race has no biological basis (Berbrier, 2013). One analyst puts it this way:

> There is less to race than meets the eye. . . . The genes influencing skin color have nothing to do with the genes influencing hair form, eye shape, blood type, musical talent, athletic ability or forms of intelligence. Knowing someone's skin color doesn't necessarily tell you anything else about him or her. ("Ten Things," 2003)

Race has little use in explaining individual differences. Racial categories vary by culture, and there can be greater genetic variation within

races than between them (Witherspoon et al., 2007). For instance, some people with Asian ancestry are short, but others are tall. Some have sunny dispositions, while others are more stern. Some are terrific athletes, while others are much less so. The same applies to people from every background. As you will read in Chapter 4, stereotyping is usually a mistake—and yet racial stereotyping occurs frequently.

Ethnicity refers to the degree to which a person identifies with a particular group, usually on the basis of nationality, culture, or some other unifying perspective (Samovar et al., 2013). For example, Irish Protestants and Catholics identify themselves as ethnically distinct from one another. The same holds true for many Sunni and Shia Muslims as well as French- and English-speaking Canadians.

It is simplistic to think of people as members of a single category. This is true for everyone, but consider former U.S. president Barack Obama, whose father was black and mother was white. Obama experienced a variety of cultures while living in Indonesia, Hawaii, California, New York, Chicago, and Washington, DC. Recognizing that culture is multidimensional, scholars have developed the concept of **intersectionality** to describe the interplay of social categories, including gender, race, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and disability status (Chávez & Griffin, 2012). No single label (e.g., woman, black, lesbian) can fully explain someone's identities, perceptions, and behaviors (Levon, 2015). Identifying with more than one group can be challenging. Consider someone like Heather Greenwood. In an article describing her experiences as a biracial person, she reports that strangers inquire how her children can have fair skin when she is dark. Others ask if she is the children's nanny or joke that the kids must have been "switched in the hospital" when they were born. The implication, Greenwood says, is that a legitimate family is either one color or another. She hears comments such as these nearly every day. "Each time is like a little paper cut, and you think, 'Well, that's not a big deal.' But imagine a lifetime of that. It hurts," she says (Saulny, 2011).

Media Clip

Straddling Cultures: *black-ish*

Bow and Dre Johnson are successful professionals living in an upscale suburb with their four children. As the title *black-ish* suggests, Dre (Anthony Anderson) and Bow (Tracee Ellis Ross) embrace their African American heritage while assimilating into co-cultures that are different from the ones in which they were raised.

Although it's a sitcom, the show isn't shy about tackling tough communication topics. Episodes have focused on use of the N-word, dealing with the police, and fitting in while honoring one's cultural legacy. This reflects the experience of the show's creator, Kenya Barris. "I wanted to be honest with what it's like raising your kids in a different environment than you were accustomed to," he told NPR's Terry Gross (2016). "My kids are nothing like I remember black kids being when I was a kid."

Barris has said that *black-ish* has less to do with race than culture. "It's not a black show," he notes (Piccalo, 2016). "But it's absolutely a show about a black family."

DARK SIDE OF COMMUNICATION

When "Harmless" Labels Do Harm

Think of a derogatory term for a particular group of people. Now think of another label for a different group. Then one more for a third. You might feel guilty that these words came to mind so quickly. But it's not surprising given the prevalence, and the sometimes casual use, of disparaging labels and slurs.

Now consider the phrase "That's so gay." Sometimes the remark has little to do with sexual orientation (Friedrichs, 2016). Instead, "gay" is used synonymously for "stupid" or "awful," even for inanimate objects ("That test was gay").

There are those who believe the phrase is harmless when it's not explicitly about sexuality. But what if *your* co-culture were equated with stupidity and used as a negative adjective? ("Ugh, that's so Christian" or "Latino" or "millennial.") The implicit judgment is why researchers regard "That's so gay" as a *microaggression*—an everyday instance of indirect or unintentional degradation of a marginalized group—that, over time, creates a climate of hostility toward people who are homosexual (Woodford et al., 2013).

Sometimes the term "gay" *is* meant as a hostile dig about sexual orientation. Communication researchers found that the people most likely to use gay slurs are heterosexual males for whom "being a man" is a central part of their identity (Hall & LaFrance 2012, 2013). The truth is that slurs and derogatory labels say more about those who use them than about the people being disparaged.

Many co-cultures have been demeaned by labels, slurs, and epithets. We must remember that the words we use have the power to both hurt and heal, so it behooves us to consider them carefully and use them wisely.

Along with the challenges, multiple-group membership can have its benefits. Many people say they are more open-minded and respectful of others as a result of coming from culturally rich backgrounds (Ross, 1996). Some research suggests multiple-group members are also more comfortable establishing relationships with a diverse array of people, which increases their options for friendships, romantic partners, and professional colleagues (Bonam & Shih, 2009).

GENDER IDENTITY/SEXUAL ORIENTATION

CNN host Anderson Cooper didn't tell the public he was gay for years because he considered it private information. He was also concerned it might put him and others in danger, and he thought he could do a better job as a journalist if he "blended in" with the dominant straight culture (Sullivan, 2012). However, Cooper says his silence sometimes felt disingenuous. "I have given some the mistaken impression that I am trying to hide something," he says. He also believed he was missing an opportunity to dispel some of the fear and prejudice that surrounds the issue. "The tide of history only advances when people make themselves fully visible." Chapter 3 has more to say about the relationship among self-concept, impression management, and self-disclosure.

Deciding whether and how to disclose gender identity or sexual orientation can sometimes be challenging, but a supportive communication climate can make those decisions easier (Dixon, 2013). Consider the workplace: It can be helpful if the organization uses inclusive language like "significant other" instead of "spouse." It's even more powerful to see authority figures identify as LGBTQ (which stands for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer"), and when other LGBTQ employees bring their partners to work.

Social networking sites such as Facebook and Tumblr provide a multitude of ways for communicators to express identities related to sexual orientation (Fox & Warber, 2015). These expressions can be affirming when the information is well received. But LGBTQ communicators who aren't out to family and friends might fear the consequences of

going public, even when public opinion is shifting in a more supportive direction.

On one hand, being open about gender identity has advantages—including a sense of being authentic with others and belonging to a supportive co-culture. On the other hand, the disclosure can sometimes be risky. People may be shocked or judgmental. They may ridicule LGBTQ individuals, discriminate against them, or even attack them. On average, one in five hate crimes in the United States targets people on the basis of their sexual orientation (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2012). For more about bullying and its antidotes, see Chapter 12.

Websites like ItGetsBetter.org deliver the message to LGBTQ youth that any harassment they may be experiencing isn't their fault and that many people care about them. Since the It Gets Better Project launched in 2010, people have posted more than 50,000 videos, which have been viewed more than 50 million times. Cofounder Dan Savage says it shows what can happen when communication technology and good intentions combine (Barth, 2013).

AGE/GENERATION

Imagine how odd it would seem to hear an 8-year-old or a senior citizen talking, dressing, or otherwise acting like a twentysomething. We tend to think of getting older as a purely biological process. But age-related communication reflects culture at least as much as biology. In many ways, we learn how to "do" various ages—how to dress, how to talk, and what not to say and do—in the same way we learn how to play other roles in our lives.

Changing cultural assumptions shape relationships between older and younger people. At some points in history, older adults have been regarded as wise, accomplished, and even possessing magical powers (Fitch, 1985). At others, they have been treated as "dead weight" and uncomfortable reminders of mortality and decline (Gergen & Gergen, 2010).

Today, for the most part, Western cultures honor youth, while attitudes (and talk) about aging are more negative than positive (Gasiorek & Fowler, 2016). On balance, people over age 40 are still twice as likely as younger ones to be depicted in the media as unattractive, bored, and in declining health (Bailey, 2010). And people over age 60, especially women, are still underrepresented in the media. However, the data present a different story. Studies show that, overall, people in their 60s are just as happy as people in their 20s (Frijters & Beatoon, 2012).

Unfavorable attitudes about aging can show up in interpersonal relationships. Even though wrinkles and gray or thinning hair don't necessarily signify diminished capacity, they may be interpreted that way—with powerful consequences. People who believe older adults have trouble communicating are less likely to interact with them. When they do, they tend to use speech mannerisms such as simplified or babyish grammar and vocabulary, increased volume and reduced rate, and repetition—all examples of overaccommodation (Giles & Gasiorek, 2011; Harwood, 2007). Even when these speech styles are well intentioned, they can have harmful effects. Older adults who are treated as less capable than their peers tend to

"If it weren't for the Deaf community, I wouldn't be where I am today," says Nyle DiMarco, winner of TV contests *Dancing with the Stars and America's Next Top Model*. His accomplishments help demonstrate that physical challenges don't necessarily stand in the way of success. ***How can communication with differently abled others enrich your life?***

perceive *themselves* as older and less capable (Lin et al., 2004). And challenging ageist treatment presents seniors with a dilemma: Speaking up can be taken as a sign of being cranky or bitter, reinforcing the stereotype that those seniors are curmudgeons (Harwood, 2007).

Communication challenges can arise when members of different generations work together. For example, one study showed that millennials tend to have less desire to make social connections at work than previous generations (Twenge et al., 2010). Such differences can cause intergenerational difficulties within team-based organizations. Millennials also have a much stronger need for affirming feedback than previous generations (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). Because of their strong desire for achievement, they want clear guidance on how to do a job correctly—but not to be micromanaged when they do it. After finishing the task, they have an equally strong desire for praise. To a baby-boomer boss, that type of guidance and feedback may feel more like a nuisance. In the boss's experience, "no news is good news," and not being told that you screwed up should be praise enough. Neither perspective is wrong. But when members of these co-cultures have different expectations, miscommunication can occur.

(DIS)ABILITIES

Nearly one in five adults in the U.S. lives with a disability (Callas, 2015). Some disabilities, such as certain cognitive challenges, aren't easily observable. Others are more visible, such as mobility or vision issues.

Communication scholars investigated how people with disabilities manage the challenges of fitting in at their places of work (Cohen & Avanzino, 2010). Participants in the study described several strategies for integrating into the culture of their organizations. One is *assimilation*—adapting and conforming to the dominant (nondisabled) group. This involves de-emphasizing differences and in some cases staying quiet about disabilities (one participant said, "The less you tell about your disability, the better off you are"). A different strategy, *accommodation*, involves acknowledging one's disability and asking for ways that it can be accommodated. It can also include educating others about disabilities and actively dispelling misperceptions. Some of the study participants were more comfortable with accommodation, others with assimilation. But none of them wanted to be defined by their disabilities.

John Altmann (2016) underscores this point by explaining the frustration of being identified only by his disability. The experience he describes took place when a motivational speaker addressed a group of high school students:

> The speaker was charismatic, exhibited a warm, jovial disposition and a wonderful sense of humor. I was smiling and laughing with the rest of the group. But at the end of the assembly, my friend and I were

> singled out by the speaker, who said something that people with disabilities hear often—that because I got around on crutches and she with a scooter, we were "inspiring."
>
> In that moment my personal characteristics, the people I love, the interests I pursue and the beliefs I hold became moot, and the fact that I have cerebral palsy and use crutches to walk became the entirety of who John Altmann is and what he is about.
>
> The friend who I sat with at the assembly got it . . . We wanted to be more than our disabilities, to overcome them and forge an identity apart from them.

Many people with disabilities find that belonging to a community of similar people can be rewarding. Deaf culture is a good example: There are Deaf schools, Deaf competitions (e.g., Miss Deaf America), Deaf performing arts (including Deaf comedians), and other organizations that bring deaf people together. For members of the Deaf community, being "different from" hearing people doesn't mean "less than." One former airline pilot who lost his hearing described his trip to China, where he interacted with colleagues who were deaf:

> Though we used different signed languages, these Chinese Deaf people and I could make ourselves understood; and though we came from different countries, our mutual Deaf culture held us together. . . . *You* couldn't do that in China. . . . Who's disabled then? (Solomon, 2012, pp. 68–69)

Regardless of the specific physical condition, it's important to treat a disability as one feature, not as a defining characteristic of others. Describing someone as "a person who is blind" is both more accurate and less constricting than calling her a "blind person." This difference might seem subtle—until you imagine which label you would prefer if you lost your sight.

First-generation college students are justifiably proud of their accomplishments. They face the challenge of navigating two worlds: their culture of origin and the world of higher education. ***Have you ever experienced life in an unfamiliar socioeconomic co-culture?***

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Social class can have a significant impact on how people communicate. People in the United States typically identify themselves as belonging to the working, middle, or upper class, and they feel a sense of solidarity with people in the same social stratum (Lucas, 2011). Social upbringing can have an effect on communication style. College professors often find that working-class college students who are raised not to challenge authority can have a difficult time speaking up, thinking critically, and arguing persuasively (Kim & Sax, 2009).

The effects of social class continue into the workplace, where skills such as assertiveness and persuasiveness are career enhancers. People who come from working-class families and attain middle- or upper-class careers face special challenges. They may have to adopt new verbal and nonverbal behaviors to gain acceptance (Kaufman, 2003). Many also must

cope with emotional ambivalences—a sense of both finding and losing their identity—related to their career success (Lubrano, 2004).

First-generation college (FGC) students may feel the intercultural strain of "trying to live simultaneously in two vastly different worlds" of school and home (Lippincott & German, 2007; Orbe & Groscurth, 2004). Because no one in their family has attended college, FGC students often cope with an unfamiliar school environment by making an effort to assimilate—going out of their way to fit in on campus. In addition, some FGC students say they overcompensate by studying harder and getting more involved on campus than their non-FGC classmates, just to prove they belong in the college culture.

At home, FGC students also engage in self-censorship but for different reasons. They are cautious when talking about college life for fear of threatening and alienating their families. Some even feel like "traitors" (Simmons et al., 2013). On the other hand, some feel a need to model their new educational status to younger family members so "they can see that it can be done."

CODES AND CULTURE

At this point, you probably have a healthy appreciation for the challenges that arise when people try to communicate interpersonally and interculturally. These challenges become even greater when the communicators use different verbal and nonverbal communication systems.

VERBAL CODES

Although the world's many languages have some remarkable similarities (Lewis et al., 2013), they also differ in important respects that affect communication within and between language groups. In the following sections, we outline some of those factors.

Language and Identity

If you live in a culture where everyone speaks the same language, you may not notice how it affects your view of yourself and others. But what happens when some members of a society speak a dominant language while others speak a minority one? Speakers of a nondominant language can feel pressured to assimilate, or they can decide not to speak in the majority language (Gann, 2004). The impact of language on the self-concept is powerful (Bergman et al., 2008). It's not surprising that people feel most confident and comfortable when communicating in their native language with people from their own culture (Allen et al., 2014).

Even the names a culture uses to identify its members reflect its values and shape the way its members relate to one another. When asked to identify themselves, individualistic Americans, Canadians, Australians, and Europeans are most likely to respond by giving their first name, surname, street, town, and country—in that order. Many Asians respond the other way around (Smith, 2011). If you ask Hindus for their identity, many will

give you their caste and village and then their name. The Sanskrit formula for identifying oneself begins with lineage, goes on to state family and house, and ends with one's personal name (Bharti, 1985). Japanese has as many as 100 different ways to say *I*, depending on whether you want to be polite, casual, businesslike, or arrogant; to emphasize your family role, your social situation, age, or gender ("100 Ways to Say 'I' in Japanese," 2013).

Verbal Communication Styles

Using language is more than just a matter of choosing a particular group of words to convey an idea. Each language has its own unique style that distinguishes it from others. Matters such as the amount of formality or

@work Organizations Are Cultures

Organizations have cultures that can be just as distinctive as those of larger societies. *Organizational culture* reflects a relatively stable, shared set of values and behavioral rules within a company (Alvesson, 2011). In everyday language, culture is the insiders' view of "the way things are around here."

Not all the rules and values of an organization are written down. And some that are written down aren't actually followed. Perhaps the workday officially ends at 5 p.m., but you quickly notice that most people stay until at least 6:30. That says something about the culture.

Because you're likely to spend as much time at work as you do in personal relationships, selecting the right organization is as important as choosing a best friend. Research shows that we are likely to enjoy our jobs and do them well if we believe that the organization's values reflect our own and are consistently and fairly applied (Hartnell et al., 2011). For example, some companies reward team members for offering great customer service without exception. On the other hand, a boss who talks about customer service but violates those principles may cultivate a culture of cynicism and dissatisfaction.

Ask yourself these questions when considering whether a specific organization's culture is a good fit for you. (Notice the importance of communication in each case.)

- How does the organization present itself online?
- Do members of the organization have the resources and authority to do a good job?
- Do employees have fun? Are they encouraged to be creative?
- Is there a spirit of cooperation or competition among team members?
- What criteria are used to evaluate employee performance?
- What happens during meetings? Is communication open or highly scripted?
- How often do people leave their jobs to work somewhere else?
- Do leaders make a point of listening, respecting, and collaborating with employees?
- Do people use their time productively, or are they bogged down with inefficient procedures or office politics?

Research suggests that communication—even seemingly unimportant small talk (Mak & Chui, 2013)—is the vehicle through which we both create and embody culture. At a personal and organizational level, effective, consistent, value-based communication is essential to success.

informality, precision or vagueness, and brevity or detail are major ingredients in speaking competently. When a communicator tries to use the verbal style associated with one culture in a different one, problems are likely to arise.

Gudykunst (2005) describes three important types of cultural differences in verbal style:

1. *Direct versus indirect*. We've already discussed how low-context cultures use language primarily to express thoughts, feelings, and ideas as clearly, directly, and logically as possible, whereas high-context cultures may speak less directly, using language to maintain social harmony.
2. *Elaborate versus succinct*. For instance, speakers of Arabic commonly use language that is much more rich and expressive than normally found in English. Strong assertions and exaggerations that would sound outlandish in English are a common feature of Arabic. This contrast in linguistic style can lead to misunderstandings between people from different backgrounds.

   Succinctness is most extreme in cultures where silence is valued. In many Native American cultures, for example, the favored way to handle ambiguous social situations is to remain quiet (Ferraro & Andreatta, 2012). When you contrast this silent style to the talkativeness that is common when people first meet in mainstream American cultures, it's easy to imagine how the first encounter between an Apache or Navajo and a European American might be uncomfortable for both people.
3. *Formal versus informal*. One guidebook for British readers who want to understand how Americans communicate describes the openness and informality that characterizes U.S. culture:

   > Visitors may be overwhelmed by the sheer exuberant friendliness of Americans, especially in the central and southern parts of the country. Sit next to an American on an airplane and he will immediately address you by your first name, ask "So—how do you like it in the States?," explain his recent divorce in intimate detail, invite you home for dinner, offer to lend you money, and wrap you in a warm hug on parting. This does not necessarily mean he will remember your name the next day. Americans are friendly because they just can't help it; they like to be neighbourly and want to be liked. (Faul, 2008, p. 1)

   The informal approach that characterizes communication in countries such as the United States is quite different from the great concern for propriety in many parts of Asia and Africa. In those cultures, formality isn't so much a matter of using correct grammar as observing social norms. For example, one sign of being a learned person in Korea is the ability to use language that recognizes relational distinctions such as old friends, nonacquaintances whose background one knows, and complete strangers (Bjørge, 2007).

Verbal codes also operate closer to home, where people from different regions, socioeconomic backgrounds, generations, and ethnic groups have distinct ways of speaking. You don't have to be a linguist to recognize distinctive codes such as inner-city jargon or teenage slang (Giles & Rakic, 2014). Consider how people could likely make accurate guesses about the co-culture(s) in which you were raised just by listening to you talk.

The TV series *Orange Is the New Black* follows Piper Chapman (Taylor Schilling), whose privileged life changes when she is sentenced to a term in federal prison. Piper has to adapt to the culture of prison—including its raw language codes—to survive. ***Can you think of times when you've changed your verbal style to adapt to a new context?***

Code-Switching

Communicators often adapt their manner of speaking when they change contexts—a practice linguists call **code-switching** (Bullock & Toribio, 2012). Code-switching is a form of communication competence that increases the chances of achieving your goals. One American expat living in Ireland offered an amusing account of how switching codes to sound more like a native helped save money (Thompson, 2013):

> We noticed there were often two prices for goods and services—reasonable prices for the locals and much more expensive costs for others (Americans). It was not easy, but I practiced my Irish accent until we qualified for "local pricing."

Code-switching is a far more serious matter for members of some co-cultures. One writer (Bastién, 2016) explains how African Americans often adopt mainstream white speech mannerisms as a means of self-defense:

> We learn early and often that the way we are in spaces with other black people is not the way we should be in professional circles. So the clipped words, slang and biting humor we use with friends becomes smoothed out. We take on a style that our white peers find safe and nonthreatening.

Shifting between codes doesn't require rejecting your heritage. Think of it as a type of bilingual ability. A first-generation student from rural Appalachia described feeling out of place at a state university when she used expressions common to her region, such as "holler" and "dicker" (Landecker, 2016). When she took a course on language diversity that encouraged her to embrace her home dialect (form of language), she said, "I fell head over heels in love with it." That student might have chosen to code-switch at times, but she would be doing so for pragmatic reasons, without feeling shame about her roots. And when she was comfortable with people who appreciated her heritage, she could settle into the manner of speaking she learned while growing up.

By now you should understand that verbal codes aren't "right" or "wrong"; they're simply reflections of different cultures. For more about the linguistic functions of code-switching, see Chapter 5's section on "Affiliation."

FOCUS ON RESEARCH

Saying "I'm Sorry" in Japanese and English: Different Codes

You're late meeting a friend. When you finally arrive, what—and how much—should you say? Communication researcher Mariko Kotani finds that culture plays an important role in both offering and interpreting apologies.

Kotani conducted in-depth interviews with native Japanese and English speakers (in their own tongues) to learn more about their speech codes. They were asked to describe a variety of minor offenses in their personal relationships and how to best address them.

In Japanese culture, "I'm sorry" is a necessary part of acknowledging a mistake (such as tardiness), and it might be said several times. Its primary meaning is "I'm sorry you were inconvenienced," with a focus on the other person's feelings. Offering explanations is viewed as making excuses, and that's bad form. *Saving the other person's face is paramount.* The governing code is to apologize profusely, then move on.

For the English-speaking Americans, the unwritten code is that "I'm sorry" is an admission of responsibility. If the phrase is used, it's typically followed by an explanation—often a lengthy one. The goal behind expressing regret is to gain forgiveness ("That's okay") and perhaps dodge blame ("It was traffic's fault"). *Saving one's own face is paramount.* Explain until you get absolved.

These different codes pose challenges for intercultural relations. What does "I'm sorry" mean? Are explanations helpful or not? Competent communicators need to be aware of how members of other cultures may perceive their well-intentioned words.

Kotani, M. (2016). Two codes for remedying problematic situations: Japanese and English speakers' views of explanations and apologies in the United States. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research, 45,* 126–144.

NONVERBAL CODES

Many elements of nonverbal communication are shared by all humans, regardless of culture (Matsumoto, 2006). For instance, people of all cultures convey messages through facial expressions and gestures. Furthermore, some of these physical displays have the same meaning everywhere. Crying is a universal sign of unhappiness or pain, and smiles signal friendly intentions. (Of course, smiles and tears may be insincere and manipulative, but their overt meanings are similar and constant in every culture.)

Despite nonverbal similarities, the range of differences in nonverbal behavior is tremendous. Consider the use of gestures such as the "OK" sign made by joining thumb and forefinger to form a circle. This gesture is a cheery affirmation to most Americans, but it has very different meanings in other parts of the world (Knapp & Hall, 2006; Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013). In France and Belgium, it means "you're worth zero"; in Japan, it means "money"; and in Greece and Turkey, it is an insulting or vulgar sexual invitation. Given this sort of cross-cultural ambiguity, it's easy to visualize how a tourist from the United States could wind up in serious trouble overseas without understanding why.

Less obvious cross-cultural differences can damage relationships without the communicators ever recognizing exactly what has gone wrong (Beaulieu, 2004). For example, Anglo-Saxons use the largest zone of personal space, followed by Asians. People from the Mediterranean and Latinos use the closest distance. Imagine the awkward advance and retreat

pattern that might occur when two diplomats or businesspeople from these cultures meet. The Middle Easterner might keep moving forward to close the gap, while the North American would back away. Both would probably feel uncomfortable.

Like distance, patterns of eye contact vary around the world. Americans learn to maintain eye contact during conversations, and avoiding eye contact can be interpreted as insincerity or a sign of weakness. By contrast, in China a mutual gaze is appropriate only in close, interdependent relationships (Guo & Hu, 2013). In either case, deviations from the norm are likely to make a culturally uneducated listener uncomfortable. You'll read much more about cultural differences in nonverbal communication in Chapter 6.

DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

What distinguishes competent from incompetent intercultural communicators? In the rest of this chapter, we focus on answering this question. But before we get to the answers, take a moment to complete the "Assessing Your Communication" quiz on page 60 to evaluate your intercultural communication competence.

To a great degree, interacting successfully with people from different cultures calls for the same ingredients of general communicative competence outlined in Chapter 1. It's important to have a wide range of behaviors and to be skillful at choosing and performing the most appropriate ones in a given situation. A genuine concern for others plays an important role. Cognitive complexity and the ability to empathize also help, although empathizing with someone from another culture can be challenging (Cassels et al., 2010). Finally, self-monitoring is important because the need to make mid-course corrections in your approach is often necessary when dealing with people from other cultures.

But beyond these basic qualities, communication researchers have sought to identify qualities that are unique, or at least especially important, ingredients of intercultural communicative competence (Arasaratnam & Banerjee, 2011; Dai & Chen, 2015).

ASSESSING YOUR COMMUNICATION

What Is Your Intercultural Communication Competence?

Imagine yourself interacting with people from a wide variety of cultural groups, not just one or two. Record your first impression to each of the following statements using a scale ranging from 1 to 7, where 1 = "strongly disagree" and 7 = "strongly agree." In addition, consider inviting someone who knows you well to rate you on each item.

_____ **1.** I am conscious of the cultural knowledge I use when interacting with people with different cultural backgrounds.

_____ **2.** I adjust my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from a culture that is unfamiliar to me.

_____ **3.** I check the accuracy of my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from different cultures.

_____ **4.** I know the rules (e.g., vocabulary, grammar) of other languages.

_____ **5.** I know the cultural values and religious beliefs of other cultures.

_____ **6.** I know the rules for expressing nonverbal behaviors in other cultures.

_____ **7.** I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures.

_____ **8.** I am confident that I can socialize with locals in a culture that is unfamiliar to me.

_____ **9.** I enjoy living in cultures that are unfamiliar to me.

_____ **10.** I change my verbal behavior (e.g., accent, tone) when a cross-cultural interaction requires it.

_____ **11.** I use pause and silence differently to suit different cross-cultural situations.

_____ **12.** I vary the rate of my speaking when a cross-cultural situation requires it.

_____ **13.** I change my nonverbal behavior when a cross-cultural situation requires it.

_____ **14.** I alter my facial expressions when a cross-cultural interaction requires it.

Adapted from Ang, S., Van Dyne, L., Koh, C., Ng, K., Templer, K. J., Tay, C., & Chandrasekar, N. (2007). Cultural intelligence: Its measurement and effects on cultural judgment and decision making, cultural adaptation and task performance. *Management and Organization Review, 3*, 335–371.

For scoring information, see page 66 at the end of the chapter.

MOTIVATION AND ATTITUDE

The desire to communicate successfully with strangers is an important start. For example, people who are highly willing to communicate with people from other cultures report a greater number of friends from different

backgrounds than those who are less willing to reach out (Kassing, 1997). But desire alone isn't sufficient (Arasaratnam, 2006). Some other ways of thinking described here are essential when dealing with people from other backgrounds (Samovar et al., 2007).

TOLERANCE FOR AMBIGUITY

As noted earlier, one of the most important concerns facing communicators is their desire to reduce uncertainty about one another (Berger, 1988; Gibbs et al., 2011). When we encounter communicators from different cultures, the level of uncertainty is especially high. Consider the basic challenge of communicating in an unfamiliar language. Pico Iyer (1990, pp. 129–130) captures the ambiguity that arises from a lack of fluency when he describes his growing friendship with Sachiko, a Japanese woman he met in Kyoto:

> I was also beginning to realize how treacherous it was to venture into a foreign language if one could not measure the shadows of the words one used. When I had told her, in Asuka, "*Jennifer Beals ga suki-desu. Anata mo*" ("I like Jennifer Beals—and I like you"), I had been pleased to find a way of conveying affection, and yet, I thought, a perfect distance. But later I looked up suki and found that I had delivered an almost naked protestation of love. . . .
>
> Meanwhile, of course, nearly all her shadings were lost to me. . . . Once, when I had to leave her house ten minutes early, she said, "I very sad," and another time, when I simply called her up, she said, "I very happy"—and I began to think her unusually sensitive, or else prone to bold and violent extremes, when really she was reflecting nothing but the paucity of her English vocabulary. . . . Talking in a language not one's own was like walking on one leg; when two people did it together, it was like a three-legged waltz.

Competent intercultural communicators accept—even welcome—this kind of ambiguity. Iyer (1990, pp. 220–221) describes the way the mutual confusion he shared with Sachiko actually helped their relationship develop:

> Yet in the end, the fact that we were both speaking in this pared-down diction made us both, I felt, somewhat gentler, more courteous, and more vulnerable than we would have been otherwise, returning us to a state of innocence.

Without a tolerance for ambiguity, the mass of often confusing and sometimes downright incomprehensible messages that bombard intercultural sojourners would be impossible to manage. Some people seem to come equipped with this sort of tolerance, while others have to cultivate it. One way or the other, that ability to live with uncertainty is an essential ingredient of intercultural communication competence (Gudykunst, 1993).

OPEN-MINDEDNESS

Being comfortable with ambiguity is important, but without an open-minded attitude a communicator will have trouble interacting competently with people from different backgrounds. To understand open-mindedness,

Watch and Discuss

Look up and watch "Momondo: The DNA Journey."

1) Identify the roles of *ethnocentrism* and *prejudice* in some of the comments made.
2) Discuss how learning about one's ancestry could assist intercultural communication.

it's helpful to consider two traits that are incompatible with it. **Ethnocentrism** is an attitude that one's own culture is superior to others. An ethnocentric person thinks—either privately or openly—that anyone who does not belong to his or her in-group is somehow strange, wrong, or even inferior. (See the Watch and Discuss feature in this section for an example.) Travel writer Rick Steves (n.d.) describes how an ethnocentric point of view can interfere with respect for other cultural practices:

> We [Americans] consider ourselves very clean, but when we take baths, we use the same water for soaking, cleaning, and rinsing. (We wouldn't wash our dishes that way.) The Japanese, who use clean water for every step of the bathing process, might find our ways strange or even disgusting. People in some cultures blow their nose right onto the street. They couldn't imagine doing that into a small cloth, called a hanky, and storing it in their pocket to be used again and again. . . .
>
> Too often we judge the world in terms of "civilized" and "primitive." I was raised thinking the world was a pyramid with the US on top and everyone else was trying to get there. I was comparing people on their ability (or interest) in keeping up with us in material consumption, science, and technology. . . .
>
> Over the years, I've found that if we measure cultures differently (maybe according to stress, loneliness, heart attack rates, hours spent in traffic jams, or family togetherness), the results stack up differently. It's best not to fall into the "rating game." All societies are complex and highly developed in their own way.

Few things will open your mind to a foreign culture more than learning its language (Mafela, 2013). As Chapter 5 describes, every language carries with it a worldview—a way of understanding and talking about life's events. It's no surprise then that bilingualism is strongly linked to intercultural communication competence (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2016).

Ethnocentrism leads to an attitude of **prejudice**—an unfairly biased and intolerant attitude toward others who belong to an out-group. (Note that the root term in *prejudice* is "prejudge.") An important element of prejudice is stereotyping. Stereotypical prejudices include the obvious exaggerations that all women are emotional, all men are sex-crazed and insensitive goons, all older people are out of touch with reality, and all immigrants are welfare parasites. Stereotyping can even be a risk when it comes to knowledge of cultural characteristics such as individualism or collectivism. Not all members of a group are equally individualistic or collectivistic. For example, a close look at Americans of European and Latin descent showed differences within each group (Oetzel, 1998). Some Latinos were more independent than some European Americans, and vice versa. Open-mindedness is especially important in intercultural work teams (Matveev, 2004). We have more to say about stereotyping in Chapter 4.

KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL

Attitude alone isn't enough to guarantee success in intercultural encounters. Communicators need to possess enough knowledge of other cultures to know what approaches are appropriate. The ability to "shift gears" and

adapt one's style to the norms of another culture or co-culture is an essential ingredient of communication competence (Self, 2009).

How can a communicator acquire the culture-specific information that leads to competence? One important element is what Stella Ting-Toomey (1999) and others label as *mindfulness*—awareness of one's own behavior and that of others. Communicators who lack this quality blunder through intercultural encounters *mindlessly*, oblivious of how their own behavior may confuse or offend others, and how behavior that they consider weird may be simply different. Formally studying a culture by taking courses or training seminars can help increase mindfulness, as can informal learning experiences such as traveling, reading international press, and having contact with people from different cultural groups (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012).

PATIENCE AND PERSEVERANCE

Becoming comfortable and competent in a new culture or co-culture may be ultimately rewarding, but the process isn't easy. After a "honeymoon" phase, it's typical to feel confused, disenchanted, lonesome, and homesick. To top it off, you may feel disappointed in yourself for not adapting as

FOCUS ON RESEARCH

Living in Another Culture: Adapting and Adopting

It's one thing to learn about another culture from a distance; it's another to become immersed. Gina Barker conducted 40 in-depth interviews with Americans living in Sweden and Swedes living in the United States. The two countries' unique communication styles were easy for the participants to identify and describe.

The prominent difference the interviewees noted involved communicating with strangers. Americans make smiling small talk in public with people they don't know. Swedes, on the other hand, are more reserved with strangers—but very loyal to friends. "When you get below the surface," said one participant, "you find that Swedes are just as loving, just as friendly, and just as fun. But that relationship is deeper."

Americans tend to talk more, faster, and louder than Swedes, who value silence and dislike interrupting. Swedes admit having difficulty understanding the individualism that permeates American culture. "In the U.S.," said one Swede, "it's 'I take care of my myself. Society takes care of those who are weak.' In Sweden, it's 'Society takes care of everyone.'" Conversely, Americans find Sweden's collectivism challenging to grasp: "When I ask questions about why things are the way they are, the answer I get is some version of: 'This is the way we all do it.'"

The majority of the participants felt responsible to adapt to their host culture in order to facilitate intercultural communication. "I understand and enter into the culture," said one, "and know how to act in order to maintain close relationships." And some even adopt new communication practices. A few of the Swedes said they have become friendlier with strangers, while an American came away with this change:

> When I go (home) to America and I'm standing in line and someone starts chatting me up, I'm like, "Can I have my privacy? I don't want to talk to you right now."

Barker, G. G. (2016). Cross-cultural perspectives on intercultural communication competence. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research, 45,* 13–30.

easily as you expected. This stage—which typically feels like a crisis—has acquired the labels *culture shock* or *adjustment shock*.

You wouldn't be the first person to be blindsided by culture shock. When Lynn Chih-Ning Chang (2011) came to the United States from Taiwan for graduate school, she cried every day on the way home from class. All her life, she had been taught that it was respectful and ladylike to sit quietly and listen, so she was shocked that American students spoke aloud without raising their hands, interrupted each other, addressed the teacher by first name, and ate food in the classroom. What's more, Chang's classmates answered so quickly that by the time she was ready to say something, they were already on a new topic. The same behavior that made her "a smart and patient lady in Taiwan," she says, made her seem like a "slow learner" in the United States.

Communication theorist Young Yum Kim (2005) has studied cultural adaptation extensively. She says it's natural to feel a sense of push and pull between the familiar and the novel. Kim encourages sojourners to regard stress as a good sign. It means they have the potential to adapt and grow. With patience, the sense of crisis begins to wane and, and once again, there's energy and enthusiasm to learn more.

Communication can be a challenge while you're learning how to operate in new cultures, but it can also be a solution. Chang, the Taiwanese student adapting to life in America, learned this firsthand. At first, she says, she was reluctant to approach American students and they were reluctant to approach her. Gradually, she got up the courage to initiate conversations, and she found that her classmates were friendly and receptive. Eventually, she made friends, began to fit in, and successfully completed her degree.

The transition from culture shock to adaptation and growth is usually successful, but it isn't a smooth, linear process. Instead, people tend to take two steps forward and one step back and to repeat that pattern many times. Kim (2008) calls this a "draw back and leap" pattern. Above all, she says, if people are patient and they keep trying, the rewards are worth it.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Objective 2.1 Explain the relationship between intercultural and interpersonal dimensions of communication.

The growing diversity of American culture at home and the increased exposure to people from around the world make an understanding of intercultural communication essential. In a diverse society, interpersonal encounters are marked by degrees of cultural and co-cultural salience.

Q: What are the most salient intercultural differences you are likely to encounter in your interpersonal relationships?

Objective 2.2 Describe five key values that help shape a culture's communication norms.

When members of different cultures interact, their values can affect interaction in ways that may be felt but not understood. These values include an emphasis on high- or low-context communication, individualism or collectivism, high or low power distance, relatively more or less avoidance of uncertainty, and either achievement or nurturing.

Q: What key values characterize the culture in which you communicate most comfortably?

Q: What communication challenges arise when you communicate with people with different values?

Objective 2.3 Recognize the range of co-cultures in today's society and how co-cultural factors can affect interpersonal communication.

Within any society, people belong to a variety of co-cultures, each of which carries its own identity and operates with its own set of communication rules. Some co-cultures include ethnicity and race, gender identity and sexual orientation, age/generation, and socioeconomic status.

Q: What co-cultures do you belong to, and what rules govern communication within these groups? How do these rules differ for members of other co-cultures you are likely to encounter?

Q: How can you best manage your communication with members of other co-cultures?

Objective 2.4 Explain the factors that shape a culture's verbal and nonverbal codes.

The codes that members of a culture use are often the most recognizable factors that shape communication between people from different backgrounds. Verbal codes include language spoken and the worldview created by it, as well as verbal communication style. Nonverbal codes also differ significantly, as do the attributions that cultural conditioning generates.

Q: Describe a set of cultural values, norms, and codes different from yours that could result in different cultural communication patterns.

Objective 2.5 Identify the attitudes, knowledge, and skills required for intercultural communication competence.

Intercultural communicative competence involves five dimensions: motivation and attitude, tolerance for ambiguity, open-mindedness, knowledge and skill, and patience and perseverance.

Q: Explain how you can apply the guidelines for intercultural competence in this chapter when interacting with people of cultural backgrounds different from your own.

KEY TERMS

Achievement culture (48)
Co-culture (39)
Code-switching (57)
Collectivistic culture (45)
Culture (38)
Ethnicity (49)
Ethnocentrism (62)
High-context culture (43)
Individualistic culture (44)
In-group (39)
Intercultural communication (40)
Intersectionality (49)
Low-context culture (43)
Nurturing culture (48)
Out-group (39)
Power distance (46)
Prejudice (62)
Race (48)
Salience (41)
Social identity (39)
Uncertainty avoidance (47)

ACTIVITIES

1. With a group of classmates, identify the co-cultures to which each of you belongs. What in-groups do you belong to? You can best answer this question by thinking about whom you regard as belonging to out-groups. Based on your observations, consider the criteria you use to define in- and out-groups. Do you rely on race? Ethnicity? Age? Lifestyle? How do your judgments about in-and out-group membership affect your communication with others?

2. With a partner, identify one of your important interpersonal relationships. Consider how that relationship might be different if you and your partner adopted values and norms that were opposite from the ones you already hold. For example, if your communication is low context, how would things be different if you shifted to a high-context style? If you are tolerant of uncertainty, what might happen if you avoided any surprises? Based on your answers, consider the advantages and disadvantages of the cultural values and norms you hold. Think about the pros and cons of cultures that have differing values and norms.

3. The At Work sidebar on p. 55 describes how organizations have the properties of a culture. Select a place of business where you have worked and describe in a few sentences its organizational culture. What rules, either explicit or implicit, guide the communication in that workplace? Describe how these cultural norms affect how you have interacted with supervisors, coworkers, and customers on that job.

4. Identify one culture with which you currently interact or could interact with in the future. Collect information on communication rules and norms in that culture through library/internet research and personal interviews. Based on your findings, describe the steps you can take to communicate more effectively with the culture's members.

5. Use the criteria on pages 60–64 to evaluate your intercultural communication competence. If possible, invite someone from a different culture or co-culture to help with this assessment.

SCORING FOR ASSESSING YOUR COMMUNICATION (PAGE 60)

Add responses to items 1, 2, and 3. This is your metacognitive cultural intelligence score

Add responses to items 4, 5, and 6. This is your cognitive cultural intelligence score.

Add responses to items 7, 8, and 9. This is your motivational cultural intelligence score.

Add responses to items 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14. This is your behavioral cultural intelligence score.

Metacognitive cultural intelligence refers to the mental processes individuals use, such as planning and monitoring, to understand cultures. Those with high metacognitive cultural intelligence—scores of 15 and higher—are consciously aware of others' cultural preferences before and during interactions, and question their assumptions and adjust accordingly.

Cognitive cultural intelligence refers to knowledge of the norms, practices, and conventions in different cultures. Those with high cognitive cultural intelligence—scores of 11 and higher—understand similarities and differences across cultures.

Motivational cultural intelligence refers to the capability to direct attention and energy toward learning about and functioning in situations characterized by cultural differences. Those with high motivational

cultural intelligence—scores of 16 and higher—direct attention and energy toward cross-cultural situations and have confidence in their interaction effectiveness.

Behavioral cultural intelligence refers to the capability to exhibit appropriate verbal and nonverbal communication behaviors when interacting with people from different cultures. Those with high behavioral cultural intelligence—scores of 21 and higher—exhibit behaviors appropriate to the situation.

3

Interpersonal Communication and the Self

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

3.1 Describe how the self-concept is subjective and is shaped by, and consequently affects, communication with others.

3.2 Explain how we manage impressions in person and online to enhance our presenting image.

3.3 Identify an optimal level of self-disclosure and non-disclosure in effective relationships.

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WHO ARE YOU? Before reading on, take a few minutes to try a simple exercise. First, make a list of the 10 words or phrases that describe the most important features of who you are. Some may be social roles (student, son or daughter, employee). Some may be physical characteristics (athletic, tall), others intellectual (smart, inquisitive). Perhaps you can best define yourself in terms of moods, feelings, or attitudes (optimistic, critical, energetic). Or you could consider your social characteristics (outgoing, shy, defensive). You may highlight belief systems (pacifist, Christian, vegetarian, libertarian). Maybe your work is an important part of who you are (barista, teacher, blogger). Finally, you could focus on particular skills (swimmer, artist, chess player). In any case, choose 10 words or phrases that best describe you and write them down. Next, reorder your list, ranking the 10 items from most to least fundamental to your identity.

COMMUNICATION AND THE SELF-CONCEPT

The list you created in this exercise offers clues about your **self-concept**: the relatively stable set of perceptions you hold of yourself. Imagine a mirror that reflected not only your appearance but other aspects of who you are—your typical emotional states, special talents, likes, dislikes, values, roles, and so on. That reflection would be your self-concept.

Note that any description you constructed in this exercise is only a partial one. To make it even close to complete, you'd have to add hundreds of words. Of course, not every dimension of your self-concept list is equally important, and the types of descriptions that are most important vary from person to person. For example, the most significant part of one person's self-concept might consist of social roles, whereas for another it might be physical appearance, health, friendships, accomplishments, or skills.

Self-esteem is the part of the self-concept that involves evaluations of self-worth. Your self-concept might include being quiet, argumentative, or serious. How you *feel* about these qualities determines your self-esteem.

Self-esteem evaluations begin at a young age (Cvencek et al., 2016) and have a powerful, cyclical effect on communication behavior, as Figure 3.1 shows. People who feel good about themselves have positive expectations about how they will communicate (Baldwin & Keelan, 1999). These feelings increase the chance that communication will be successful, and successes contribute to positive self-evaluations, which reinforce self-esteem. Of course, the same principle can work in a negative cycle when communicators have low self-esteem. One study found that people with low self-esteem don't fare well on social networking sites (Forest & Wood, 2012): They tend to post more negative information, and people are less likely to respond to downbeat messages. What could be a tool for connecting with others can thus perpetuate low self-esteem.

FIGURE 3.1 The Relationship Between Self-Esteem and Communication Behavior

Adapted from Johnson, 1998.

Although high self-esteem has obvious benefits, it doesn't guarantee interpersonal success. People with high self-esteem may *think* they make better impressions on others and have better friendships and romantic lives, but neither impartial observers nor objective tests verify these beliefs (Baumeister et al., 2003). It's easy to see how people with an inflated sense of self-worth could irritate others by coming across as condescending know-it-alls. Moreover, people with low self-esteem have the potential to change their self-appraisals. The point here is that positive self-evaluations can often be the starting point for positive communication with others.

HOW THE SELF-CONCEPT DEVELOPS

Researchers generally agree that self-concept does not exist at birth (Rochat, 2001). At about 6 or 7 months of age, infants begin to recognize "self" as distinct from surroundings. If you've ever watched children at this age, you've probably marveled at how they can stare with great fascination at their own foot or hand, almost as if these were strange objects belonging to someone else. Then the connection is made: "The foot is me," "The hand is me." These first revelations form the child's earliest concept of self.

As the child develops, this rudimentary sense of identity expands into a much more complete and sophisticated picture that resembles the self-concept of adults. This evolution is almost totally a product of social interaction (Kranstuber & Kellas, 2011). Two complementary theories describe how interaction with others shapes the way individuals view themselves: reflected appraisal and social comparison.

Reflected Appraisal

Now try the following exercise. First, recall someone who helped enhance your self-esteem by acting in a way that made you feel accepted, worthwhile, important, appreciated, or loved. For instance, you might recall a childhood teacher who took time to encourage you specifically. Next,

Early messages from significant others can shape the self-concept for a lifetime. ***What messages from your childhood have affected your self-concept and the way you communicate?***

recall someone who acted in either a big or small way to diminish your self-esteem, such as a coach who criticized you in front of the team.

After thinking about these two types of interactions, you should begin to see that everyone's self-concept is to some degree a **reflected appraisal**: a mirroring of others' judgments (Asencio, 2013). To the extent that you have received supportive messages, you have learned to appreciate and value yourself. Receiving critical signals, on the other hand, can make you feel less valuable, lovable, and capable (Lemay & Dudley, 2009). In part, your self-concept is a reflection of the messages you've received throughout your life—both in person and via social media (Wallace & Tice, 2012).

Social scientists use the term **significant other** to describe a person whose evaluations are especially influential (Dehart et al., 2011). Messages from parents, of course, are an early and important influence on the self-concept. Supportive parents are more likely than unsupportive ones to raise children with stable self-concepts and high self-esteem (Sillars et al., 2005). Unfortunately, not all parental messages are positive. For instance, daughters exposed to "fat talk" from their mothers often develop body image issues, sometimes resulting in eating disorders (Arroyo & Andersen, 2016). Along with family, the messages from many other significant others shape our self-concept. Teachers, friends, romantic partners, and even some acquaintances can all leave an imprint on how you view yourself—sometimes for better, sometimes for worse (Rill et al., 2009).

You might argue that not every part of your self-concept is shaped by others. After all, nobody needs to tell you whether you are tall, speak with an accent, have curly hair, and so on. Indeed, some features of the self are immediately apparent. But the *significance* we attach to them—that is, the rank we assign them in the hierarchy of our list and the interpretation we give them—depends greatly on the opinions of others.

Social Comparison

So far, we have looked at the way others' messages shape one's self-concept and self-esteem. In addition to using these messages, we form our self-image by the process of **social comparison**: evaluating ourselves in comparison with others (Strickhouser & Zell, 2015). We decide whether we are superior or inferior (which influences our self-esteem) and similar or different (which influences our self-concept) by comparing ourselves to what social scientists call **reference groups**—others against whom we evaluate our own characteristics (Van De Gaer et al., 2012).

You might feel ordinary or inferior in terms of talent, friendships, or attractiveness if you compare yourself with an inappropriate reference group. For instance, studies have shown that young women who regularly compare themselves with ultra-thin models develop negative appraisals of their own bodies, in some cases leading to eating disorders (Arroyo, 2015; Krcmar et al., 2008). Men, too, who compare themselves to media-idealized male physiques evaluate their bodies negatively (Cho & Lee, 2013).

FOCUS ON RESEARCH

Does Instagram = #Instasad?

Along with its personal and relational benefits, Facebook usage has been linked with lower self-esteem and even depression for some users. A research team led by Katerina Lup wanted to know if the same holds true for Instagram, the photo-sharing network.

In the study, 117 regular users of Instagram (ages 18–29) were asked about their use of the social media tool. They were also given a battery of tests measuring tendencies toward social comparison and depression. The researchers were not surprised to find some connection between Instagram use, negative social comparison, and depressive symptoms.

But there was a twist to these findings: The negative effects were highest for those who followed more strangers on Instagram. For those who mostly followed friends and family, social comparisons were generally positive and depressive symptoms low.

The researchers suggest that we don't feel inferior when comparing ourselves to people we know well because we're not fooled by their glamorous self-portrayals. With strangers, we're more prone to believe they *do* live better lives—and comparisons with them are thus more depressing.

The takeaway? Consider limiting the number of strangers you follow on Instagram and other social media—and remember that their lives aren't as perfect as they may seem.

Lup, K., Trub, L., & Rosenthal, L. (2015). Instagram #instasad?: Exploring associations among Instagram use, depressive symptoms, negative social comparison, and strangers followed. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 18,* 247–252.

People also use others' online profiles as points of comparison, and they may feel less attractive, successful, and happy after doing so (Arroyo & Brunner, 2016). In particular, Facebook comparisons can lead to lowered self-esteem and even depression (Cramer et al., 2016). As you'll read later in this chapter, social networking profiles are an exercise in impression management, and they rarely reflect the warts and bumps of everyday life. But some look at others' Facebook pages and conclude, "They are happier and having better lives than I am" (Chou & Edge, 2012). The Focus on Research sidebar on this page describes how Instagram users can make similar negative comparisons—and how choosing appropriate reference groups can be an antidote to the problem.

To some degree, we're in control of our reference groups. It's possible to seek out people with whom we compare more favorably (Beer & Hughes, 2011). For instance, you might decide that it's foolish to constantly compare your athletic prowess with that of professionals or your looks with those of movie stars. Once you place yourself alongside a truly representative sample, your self-concept may become more realistic.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SELF-CONCEPT

Now that you have a better idea of how your self-concept has developed, we can take a closer look at some of its characteristics.

The Self-Concept Is Subjective

The way we view ourselves may be at odds with others' perceptions—and often with the observable facts. Sometimes we have unrealistically favorable self-appraisals. One study found that online daters often have a

Watch and Discuss

Look up and watch the "Dove Evolution Commercial."

1. Consider how *reflected appraisal* and *social comparison* are at work in this piece.
2. Discuss the role of media models in shaping self-images.

"foggy mirror"—that is, they see themselves more positively than others do (Ellison et al., 2006).

As another example, people are notoriously bad judges of their own communication skills. In one study, there was no relationship between the subjects' self-evaluations as interpersonal communicators, public speakers, or listeners and their observed ability to perform well in any of these areas (Carrell & Willmington, 1996). In another study (Myers, 1980), college students were asked to rank themselves on their ability to get along with others. Defying mathematical laws, all subjects—every last one of more than 800,000—put themselves in the top half of the population. A total of 60 percent rated themselves in the top 10 percent of the population, and an amazing 25 percent believed they were in the top 1 percent. These students had similarly lofty appraisals of their leadership and athletic abilities.

There are also times when we view ourselves more harshly than the facts warrant. We have all experienced a temporary case of the "uglies," convinced we look much worse than others would say we appear. Although everyone suffers occasional bouts of low self-esteem, some people suffer from long-term or even permanent states of excessive self-doubt and criticism (Wood et al., 2009). This chronic condition can of course influence communication with others.

Self-evaluations can be distorted for several reasons:

- *Obsolete information*. The effects of past failures in school or social relations can linger long after they have occurred, even though such events don't predict failure in the future. Likewise, your past successes don't guarantee future success.
- *Distorted feedback*. The remarks of overly critical parents, cruel classmates, uncaring teachers, excessively demanding employers, or even rude strangers can have a lasting effect. Other distorted messages are unrealistically positive. For instance, a child's inflated ego may be based on the praise of doting parents, and a boss's inflated ego may come from the praise of brownnosing subordinates.
- *Perfectionism*. From the time most of us learn to understand language, we are exposed to models who appear to be perfect. The implicit message is "A well-adjusted, successful person has no faults." The naive belief in perfection—either our own or others'—can distort the self-concept.
- *Social expectations*. Curiously, our perfectionist society generally rewards those who downplay their strengths. We usually consider those who show off their strengths to be braggarts or egotists, confusing them with people who boast about accomplishments they do not possess (Miller et al., 1992). This convention leads many people to talk freely about (and dwell on) their shortcomings while downplaying their accomplishments.

A Healthy Self-Concept Is Flexible

People change. Shy children might turn into outgoing adults. Moody teenagers can become upbeat professionals. People also change from context to context. You might be a relaxed conversationalist with people you

know but at a loss for words with strangers. The self-concepts of most communicators react to these changes ("I'm patient at work," "I'm not patient at home"), and these changes affect self-esteem ("I'm not as good a person at home as I am in the office").

Think back to your list of self-descriptions from the exercise at the beginning of the chapter. How many were true of you 5 to 10 years ago? Which do you think will still be true 5 to 10 years from now? It's helpful for communicators to take stock of themselves now and then and acknowledge changes to their self-concept. But that's not always easy, as we'll see.

The Self-Concept Resists Change

To be realistic, a self-concept should reflect the way we change over time, but it often does not. We resist revising it and even seek out people who confirm how we see ourselves. Numerous studies (e.g., Rehman et al., 2009; Stets & Cast, 2007) have shown that both college students and married couples with high self-esteem seek out partners who view them favorably, whereas those with low self-esteem are more inclined to interact with people who view them unfavorably. This tendency to seek confirmation of an existing self-concept, labeled *cognitive conservatism*, appears to hold true for people in a variety of cultures (Church et al., 2012).

We are understandably reluctant to revise a favorable self-perception (DeMarree et al., 2011). If you were a thoughtful, romantic partner early in a relationship, it would be hard to admit that you might have become less considerate and attentive lately. Likewise, if you used to be a serious student, acknowledging that you have slacked off isn't easy.

Curiously, the tendency to cling to an outmoded self-perception holds even when the new image would be more favorable (DeMarree et al., 2010). For example, some of our former students still view themselves as underachievers despite being successful on several measures. Some people have difficulty receiving and believing compliments about who they have become (Kille

Media Clip

Reflecting Years of Appraisal: *This Is Us*

The time-hopping TV series *This Is Us* offers a unique opportunity to witness how interpersonal messages shape self-concepts. Some scenes focus on the parenting of Jack and Rebecca Pearson (Milo Ventimiglia and Mandy Moore) as they raise their children at the end of the 20th century. Other times the series moves to present day, revealing how those children turned out in their late 30s.

In flashback sequences, we see how messages about weight have haunted Kate (Chrissy Metz) most of her life. Randall (Sterling K. Brown) struggles to find his identity as a black child growing up in a white family. And because his siblings seem to get the lion's share of attention, Kevin (Justin Hartley) constantly craves a spotlight of his own. All of these issues carry forward to adulthood—and the Pearson children develop various ways to refine their self-concepts and maintain their self-esteem.

The show demonstrates that while biology plays a role in who a person becomes, messages from significant others also have a profound impact.

et al., 2017). The tragedy of this sort of cognitive conservatism is obvious. People with unnecessarily negative self-esteem can become their own worst enemies, denying themselves the validation they deserve and the need to enjoy satisfying relationships.

If you're in need of a self-concept change, the best prescription is to surround yourself with significant others who offer you accurate, affirming messages about who you are and who you're becoming (Dehart et al., 2011). The shift might occur slowly, but over time you'll likely begin reflecting their appraisals.

THE SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY AND COMMUNICATION

Self-concept is such a powerful influence on the personality that it can affect your future behavior and that of others. A **self-fulfilling prophecy** occurs when a person's expectations of an event, and her or his subsequent behavior based on those expectations, make the outcome more likely to occur (Watzlawick, 2005). As you saw in the discussion surrounding Figure 3.1 on page 71, this circular process involves four stages:

1. Holding an expectation (for yourself or for others)
2. Behaving in accordance with that expectation
3. The expectation coming to pass
4. Reinforcing the original expectation

Let's use a slightly exaggerated example to illustrate the concept. One morning you read your horoscope, which offers the following prediction: "Today you will meet the person of your dreams, and the two of you will live happily ever after." Assuming you believe in horoscopes, what will you do? You'll probably start making plans to go out on the town that night in search of your "dream person." You'll dress up, groom yourself well, and carefully evaluate every person you encounter. You'll also be attentive, charming, witty, polite, and gracious when you end up meeting a good candidate. As a result, that person is likely to be impressed and attracted to you—and lo and behold, the two of you end up living happily ever after. Your conclusion? That horoscope sure had it right!

"I don't sing because I am happy. I am happy because I sing."

On closer examination, the horoscope—which helped create the Stage 1 expectation—really wasn't the key to your success. Although it got the ball rolling, you would still be single if you had stayed home that evening. Stage 2—going out on the town and acting charming—was what led your "dream person" to be attracted to you, bringing about the positive results (Stage 3). While it's tempting to credit the horoscope for the outcome (Stage 4), it's important to realize that *you* were responsible for bringing the prediction to pass—hence the term *self-fulfilling* prophecy.

The horoscope story is of course fictional, but research shows that self-fulfilling prophecies operate in real-life situations. To see how, read on.

Types of Self-Fulfilling Prophecies

There are two types of self-fulfilling prophecies. Self-imposed prophecies occur when your own expectations influence your behavior. You've probably had the experience of waking up in a cross mood and saying to yourself, "This will be a bad day." Once you made such a decision, you may have acted in ways that made it come true (e.g., avoided others, gave curt responses). On the other hand, if you approach the same day with the idea that it could be a good one, you're likely to communicate in ways that will bring good things to pass. For instance, your expectations going into an interpersonal conflict will influence how you behave—and how the conflict turns out (DiPaola et al., 2010).

A second category of self-fulfilling prophecies occurs when one person's expectations govern another's actions. The classic example was demonstrated by Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson in a study they described in their book *Pygmalion in the Classroom* (1968; see also Lee et al., 2015). The experimenters told teachers that 20 percent of the children in a certain elementary school showed unusual potential for intellectual growth. The names of the 20 percent were drawn by means of a table of random numbers—much as if they were drawn out of a hat. Eight months later these children showed significantly greater gains in IQ than did the remaining children, who had not been singled out for the teachers' attention. The change in the teachers' behavior toward these allegedly "special" children led to changes in their intellectual performance. Among other things, the teachers gave the "smart" students more time to answer questions and provided more feedback to them. These children did better not because they were any more intelligent than their classmates, but because their teachers—significant others—communicated the expectation that they could.

Notice that it isn't just the observer's *belief* that creates a self-fulfilling prophecy for the person who is the target of the expectations. The observer must *communicate that belief* verbally or nonverbally for the prediction to have any effect. If parents have faith in their children but the kids aren't aware of that confidence, they won't be affected by their parents' expectations. If a boss has concerns about an employee's ability to do a job but keeps those worries to herself or himself, the employee won't be influenced. In this sense, the self-fulfilling prophecies imposed by one person on another are as much a communication phenomenon as a psychological one.

PRESENTING THE SELF

So far, you've seen how communication shapes the way communicators view *themselves*. Now it's time to turn the tables and focus on the topic of **impression management**—the communication strategies people use to influence how *others* view them (Metts & Grohskopf, 2003). In the following pages, you will see that many of our messages are aimed at creating desired impressions.

The public face we show to the world is often different from the way we view ourselves privately. ***What differences are there between your public and private selves? What aspects of yourself are and aren't appropriate to share with others?***

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SELVES

To understand why impression management exists, it's necessary to discuss the notion of self in more detail. It's a mistake to think of "the self" as if each of us had only one identity. In truth, each of us possesses several selves, some private and others public (Fenigstein, 2009). These selves are often quite different.

The **perceived self** is the person you believe yourself to be in moments of honest self-examination. The perceived self may not be accurate in every respect. For example, you might think you are much more (or less) intelligent than an objective test would measure. Accurate or not, the perceived self is powerful because we believe it reflects who we are. You can call the perceived self "private" because you are unlikely to reveal all of it to another person. For example, you might be reluctant to share some feelings about your appearance ("I think I'm rather unattractive"), your goals ("The most important thing to me is becoming rich"), or your motives ("I care more about myself than about others").

In contrast to the perceived self, the **presenting self** is a public image—the way we want to appear to others. In most cases the presenting self we seek to create is a socially approved image: diligent student, loving partner, conscientious worker, loyal friend, and so on. Sociologist Erving Goffman (1959, 1983) used the word **face** to describe this socially approved identity, and he coined the term **facework** to describe the verbal and nonverbal ways in which we act to maintain our own presenting image and the images of others. Goffman argued that each of us can be viewed as a kind of playwright who creates roles that we want others to believe, as well as the performer who acts out those roles. This "playwriting" starts early in life as children interact with their parents (Gerholm, 2011), and it continues into adulthood in both personal and professional settings.

Goffman (1983) suggested that each of us maintains face by putting on a *front* when we are around others whom we want to impress. In contrast, behavior in the *back region*—when we are alone—may be quite different. You can recognize the difference between front and backstage behavior by recalling a time when you observed a driver, alone in her or his car, behaving in ways that would never be acceptable in public. All of us engage in backstage ways of acting that we would never exhibit in front of others. Just think of how you behave in front of the bathroom mirror when the door is locked, and you will appreciate the difference between public and private behavior. If you knew someone was watching, would you behave differently?

CHARACTERISTICS OF IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

Now that you have a sense of what impression management is, it's time to look at some characteristics of this process.

We Strive to Construct Multiple Identities

It is an oversimplification to suggest we use impression management strategies to create just one identity. In the course of even a single day, most people play a variety of roles: "respectful student," "joking friend," "kind neighbor," and "helpful worker," to suggest just a few. Even within one relationship, we play a variety of roles. As you grew up, you almost certainly changed characters as you interacted with your parents. In one context you acted as the responsible adult ("You can trust me with the car!"), and at another time you were the helpless child ("I can't find my socks!"). Likewise, in romantic relationships, we switch among many ways of behaving, depending on the context: friend, lover, business partner, critic, and so on.

Each of us constructs multiple identities, many of which may be independent or even conflicting (Spears, 2001). For example, some student-athletes experience tension when the roles of student and athlete seem to have incompatible demands (Yopyk & Prentice, 2005). Most of us seek to be perceived as warm (friendly, trustworthy) and competent (intelligent, skillful), yet we may see these two impressions as incompatible (Holoien & Fiske, 2013). Thus, people often "play dumb" when the goal is to be liked, and they become overly critical when the goal is to look smart. Balancing these two impressions is a skillful act.

It's tempting to regard some of your identities as more "real" than others, but it's more accurate to recognize that all of them are you in various roles. You may not enjoy brownnosing the boss or placating an angry customer, but that doesn't make those behaviors "not you." Instead, it means you're playing the role of "respectful employee" or "dedicated server" in ways that you (and perhaps society) deem appropriate. Communication researchers argue that differentiating between "fake" and "real" selves is counterproductive (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). Instead, it's healthier to recognize that competent communicators are multifaceted people with a variety of roles and identities—all of which are "you."

Impression management is part of living in a society. The challenge is making sure the public self you construct is consistent with your values and beliefs. ***How satisfied are you with the identities you have created? Are there better ways to manage impressions about yourself?***

Impression Management Is Collaborative

As we perform our multiple identities, our audience is made up of other actors who are trying to create their own characters. Identity-related communication is a kind of improvisation in which our character reacts with others. Good-natured teasing only works if the other person appreciates your humor and responds well. (Imagine how your kidding would fall flat if somebody didn't get or enjoy the joke.) Likewise, being a successful romantic can succeed only if the object of your affections plays his or her part.

Impression Management Can Be Deliberate or Unconscious

There's no doubt that sometimes we are highly aware of managing our identities. Most job interviews and first dates are clear examples of deliberate impression management. But in other cases we unconsciously act in ways that

are performances for others. For example, in a classic experiment participants expressed facial disgust in reaction to eating sandwiches laced with saltwater only when there was another person present; when they were alone, they made no faces (Brightman et al., 1975). Another study showed that communicators engage in facial mimicry (such as smiling or looking sympathetic in response to another's message) only in face-to-face settings, when their expressions can be seen by the other person. When they are speaking over the phone and their reactions cannot be seen, they do not make the same expressions (Chovil, 1991). Studies such as these suggest that much of our behavior is aimed at sending messages to others—in other words, impression management.

It would be an exaggeration to suggest that *all* behavior is aimed at making impressions. Young children certainly aren't strategic communicators. A baby spontaneously laughs when pleased and cries when sad or uncomfortable, without any notion of creating an impression. Likewise, there are almost certainly times when we, as adults, act spontaneously. On the whole, however, impression management strategies influence our communication.

FACE-TO-FACE IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

In face-to-face interaction, communicators can manage their front in three ways: manner, appearance, and setting. *Manner* consists of a communicator's words and nonverbal actions. In Chapters 5 and 6, we describe in detail how what you say and do create impressions. Because you have to speak and act, the question isn't whether your manner sends a message; rather, it's whether these messages will be intentional.

A second dimension of impression management is *appearance*—the personal items people use to shape an image. Sometimes clothing is part of creating a professional image. A physician's white lab coat and a police officer's uniform set the wearer apart as someone special. In the business world, a tailored suit creates a very different impression from a rumpled outfit. Off the job, clothing is just as important. People dressed in upper-middle-class fashion have a very different experience shopping than those in lower-class fashion (Aliakbari & Abdolahi, 2013). We choose clothing that sends a message about ourselves: "I'm wealthy," "I'm stylish," "I'm sexy," "I'm athletic," and a host of other possible messages.

A final way to manage impressions is through the choice of *setting*—physical items we use to influence how others view us. Cars are one example. A sporty convertible or fancy imported sedan doesn't just get drivers from one place to another; it also makes statements about the kind of people they are. The physical setting we choose and the way we arrange it are other important ways to manage impressions. How do you decorate your living space? What artwork is on your walls? What music do you play? If possible, we choose a setting that we enjoy, but in many cases we create an environment that will present the desired front to others.

IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Impression management is just as pervasive and important in mediated communication as in face-to-face interaction. At first glance, social media

@work Impression Management in the Workplace

Some advisors encourage workers to "just be yourself" on the job. But there are times when disclosing certain information about your personal life can damage your chances for success (Connell, 2012). This is especially true for people with "invisible stigmas"—traits that run the risk of being viewed unfavorably (Butler & Modaff, 2016).

Many parts of a worker's identity have the potential to be invisible stigmas: religion (evangelical Christian, Muslim), sexual orientation (gay, lesbian, bisexual), or health (bipolar, HIV positive). What counts as a stigma to some people (liberal, conservative) might be favored in another organization (Ragins & Singh, 2007).

As you consider how to manage your identity at work, take the following into account:

- *Proceed with caution.* In an ideal world, it would be safe to reveal ourselves without hesitation. But in real life, total candor can have consequences, so it may be best to move slowly.
- *Assess the organization's culture.* If your workplace seems supportive of differences—and especially if it appears to welcome people like you—then revealing more of yourself may be safe.
- *Consider the consequences of not opening up.* Keeping an important part of your identity secret can also take an emotional toll (Pachankis, 2007). If staying quiet is truly necessary, you may be better off finding a more welcoming place to work.
- *Test the waters.* If you have a trusted colleague or manager, think about revealing yourself to that person and asking advice about whether and how to go further. But realize that secrets can be leaked, so be sure the person you approach can keep confidences.

seem to limit the potential for impression management. Texting and email, for example, appear to lack the "richness" of other channels. They don't convey the tone of your voice, postures, gestures, or facial expressions. However, what is missing in mediated messages can actually be an advantage for communicators who want to manage the impressions they make (Bazarova et al., 2012).

For instance, emailers and texters can choose the desired level of clarity or ambiguity, seriousness or humor, logic or emotion in their messages. And as you learned in Chapter 1, the asynchronicity of most digital correspondence allows a sender to say difficult things without forcing the receiver to respond immediately, permitting the receiver to ignore a message rather than give an unpleasant response. Options like these show that social media can serve as a tool for impression management at least as well as the face-to-face variety (Tong & Walther, 2011b). Part of Snapchat's appeal is that it involves less impression management, because its photos vanish after a few seconds. Social media analyst Jean Twenge says this is appealing to teens who think, "If I make a funny face or use one of the filters to make myself look like a dog, it's going to disappear. It won't be something permanent my enemies at school can troll me about" (Stein, 2017).

Media Clip

The Promise and Perils of Online Relationships: *Catfish: The TV Show*

Nev Schulman knows what it's like to be in an online romance with a virtual stranger. The documentary *Catfish* chronicled his introduction to online relationships, and now, in this TV series, he wants to help others navigate those challenges.

The face-to-face encounters that Nev and his co-host, Max Joseph, arrange usually involve surprises. That's because the romantic partners' online personas typically don't match their real-life identities. Sometimes the "catfishers" have a different age, gender, or appearance from what they present on social media. But even when they've been truthful, the partners often have trouble interacting in person after months or years of impression management through digital media.

Video chat tools such as FaceTime and Skype would seem to make catfishing outmoded. But the show still offers plenty of examples of people who fall in love via text-based messages and voice calls, without ever seeing their partners. This demonstrates the power of words in creating intimacy—and also that some people have an easier time forging a relationship with an illusion than with a real person.

Social networking platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram all provide opportunities for their creators to manage impressions (Bowman, 2015; Hall et al., 2014). Consider how featuring or withholding the following kinds of information affects how others might regard your online profile: age, personal photo, educational or career accomplishments, sexual orientation, job title, personal interests, personal philosophy and religious beliefs, and organizations to which you belong (Doster, 2013). One study analyzed the Instagram feeds of 27 professional athletes and noted how they carefully presented themselves according to societal gender norms (Smith & Sanderson, 2015). But social media can also offer opportunities for transgender individuals to forge and manage their gender identities (Cavalcante, 2016).

When undergraduate Facebook users were asked how they think they come across in their profiles (Toma & Carlson, 2015), most acknowledged that their self-presentations are highly positive—but not *too* positive. In general, they believed their profiles portrayed them as better than reality on certain dimensions (e.g., "funny," "adventurous," "outgoing"), accurately on other dimensions (e.g., "physically attractive," "creative"), and worse than reality on yet other dimensions (e.g., "intelligent," "polite," "reliable"). It appears that the participants realized—perhaps intuitively—that their Facebook sites are an exercise in impression management.

Viewing your online presence from another perspective can be a valuable impression management exercise. Enter your name in a search engine and see what pops up. You may decide it's time to engage in what researchers call "reputation management" (Madden & Smith, 2010). Perhaps you'll want to change privacy settings on your profiles, customize who can see certain updates, and delete unwanted information about yourself.

IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT AND HONESTY

At first, impression management might sound like an academic label for manipulation or phoniness. There certainly are situations where people misrepresent themselves to gain the trust of others (Rui & Stefanone, 2013; Whitty, 2007). A manipulative date who pretends to be affectionate to gain sexual favors is clearly unethical and deceitful. So are job applicants who lie about their academic records to get hired or salespeople who pretend to be dedicated to customer service when their real goal is to make a quick buck.

Online deception is common—indeed, many believe that "everyone lies on the internet" (Drouin et al., 2016). In one survey, 27 percent of respondents had engaged in deceptive behaviors while online (Lenhart et al., 2001), and a diary study found that 22 percent to 25 percent of mediated interactions involve deception (George & Robb, 2008). A quarter of teens have pretended to be a different person online, and a third confess they have given false information about themselves while emailing, IMing, or game playing. Even the selection of an avatar can involve deception (Galanxhi & Nah, 2007). And it's not unusual for people to adopt different gender identities online (Guadagno et al., 2012). Some of these deceptions are relatively harmless, but others have serious consequences. Notre Dame football star Manti Te'o was duped in an internet hoax that led to national embarrassment (Jonsson, 2013), and *Catfish: The TV Show* chronicles what happens when online partners discover they've been deceived (see the Media Clip sidebar in this section).

Interviewees in one study (Toma et al., 2008) acknowledged the delicate task of balancing an ideal online identity against the "real" self behind their profile. Many admitted they sometimes fudged facts about themselves—using outdated photos or "forgetting" information about their age, for instance. But respondents were less tolerant when prospective dates posted inaccurate identities. For example, one date-seeker expressed resentment upon learning that a purported "hiker" hadn't hiked in years. Ultimately, online daters are skeptical of profiles that seem too good to be true. Candidates who present themselves in honest and even humble ways are generally perceived as more attractive than those who

come off as braggers (Wotipka & High, 2016). A little impression management and self-promotion is okay, but too much can raise red flags (Heck & Krueger, 2016).

These examples raise important ethical questions about impression management. Is it okay to omit certain information in an online dating service in an attempt to put your best foot forward? In a job interview, is it legitimate to act more confident and reasonable than you really feel? Likewise, are you justified in acting attentive in a boring conversation out of courtesy to the other person? Is it sometimes wise to use false names and information on the internet for your protection and security? Situations like these suggest that managing impressions doesn't necessarily make you a liar. In fact, it is almost impossible to imagine how we could communicate effectively without making decisions about which front to present in one situation or another.

Each of us has a repertoire of faces—a cast of characters—and part of being a competent communicator is choosing the best role for a situation. Imagine yourself in each of the following situations, and choose the most effective way you could act, considering the options:

- You offer to teach a friend a new skill, such as playing the guitar, operating a computer program, or sharpening up a tennis backhand. Your friend is making slow progress with the skill, and you find yourself growing impatient.
- You've been corresponding for several weeks with someone you met online, and the relationship is starting to turn romantic. You have a physical trait that you haven't mentioned.
- At work you face a belligerent customer. You don't believe that anyone has the right to treat you this way.

In each of these situations—and in countless others every day—you have a choice about how to act. It is an oversimplification to say that there is only one honest way to behave in each circumstance and that every other response would be insincere and dishonest. Instead, impression management involves deciding which face—which part of yourself—to reveal.

DISCLOSING THE SELF

What we choose to disclose about ourselves is an important component of impression management. So what constitutes self-disclosure? You might argue that aside from secrets, it's impossible *not* to make yourself known to others. After all, every time you post online or speak, you're revealing your tastes, interests, desires, opinions, beliefs, or some other bit of information about yourself. In addition, Chapter 6 explains how each of us communicates nonverbally.

If every verbal and nonverbal behavior in which you engage is self-revealing, how can self-disclosure be distinguished from any other act of communication? Psychologist Paul Cozby (1973) offers an answer. He suggests that for a communication act to be considered self-disclosing, (1) it must contain personal information about the sender, (2) the sender must communicate this information verbally, and (3) another person must be the target. Put differently, the subject of self-disclosing communication is the

self, and information about the self is *purposefully communicated to another person*.

SELF-DISCLOSURE FACTORS

Although this definition is a start, it ignores the fact that some messages intentionally directed toward others are not especially revealing. For example, telling an acquaintance "I don't like clams" is quite different from announcing "I don't like you." Let's take a look at several factors that further distinguish self-disclosure from other types of communication.

Honesty

It almost goes without saying that true self-disclosure has to be honest. It's not revealing to say, "I've never felt this way about anyone before" to every Saturday night date, or to preface every lie with the statement, "Let me be honest. . . ."

As long as you are honest and accurate to the best of your knowledge, communication can qualify as an act of self-disclosure. On the other hand, painting an incomplete picture of yourself (telling only part of what's true) is not genuine disclosure. You'll read more about the relationship between honesty and disclosure later in this chapter.

Opening up offers both risks and benefits. ***What parts of your identity might you disclose to others? How could you explore whether doing so is safe?***

Depth

A self-disclosing statement is generally regarded as being personal—containing relatively "deep" rather than "surface" information. Of course, what is personal and intimate for one person may not be for another. You might feel comfortable admitting your spotty academic record, short temper, or fear of spiders to anyone who asks, whereas others would be embarrassed to do so. Even basic demographic information, such as age, can be extremely revealing for some people.

Availability of Information

Self-disclosing messages must contain information that the other person is not likely to know at the time or be able to obtain from another source. For example, describing your conviction for a drunk-driving accident might feel like an act of serious disclosure because the information concerns you, is offered intentionally, is honest and accurate, and is considered personal. However, if the other person could obtain that information elsewhere without much trouble—from a quick check on the internet or from various gossips, for example—your communication would not be especially self-disclosing.

Context of Sharing

Sometimes the self-disclosing nature of a statement comes from the setting in which it is uttered. For instance, relatively innocuous information about family life seems more personal when a student shares it with the class (Frisby & Sidelinger, 2013), when an athlete tells it to her coach (Officer & Rosenfeld, 1985), or when it's shared online (Jiang et al., 2013).

We can summarize our definitional tour by saying that **self-disclosure** (1) has the self as subject, (2) is intentional, (3) is directed at another person, (4) is honest, (5) is revealing, (6) contains information generally unavailable from other sources, and (7) gains much of its intimate nature from the context in which it is expressed.

Although many acts of communication may be self-revealing, this definition makes it clear that few of our statements may be classified as self-disclosure. Most conversations—even among friends—focus on everyday, mundane topics and disclose little or no personal information (Dindia et al., 1997). Even partners in intimate relationships don't talk about personal matters with a high degree of frequency (Laliker & Lannutti, 2014).

MODELS OF SELF-DISCLOSURE

Now that you have a basic notion of what self-disclosure is, let's take a look at two models that help us better understand how it operates in relationships.

Degrees of Self-Disclosure: The Social Penetration Model

Social psychologists Dalmas Taylor and Irwin Altman (1987) created the **social penetration model**, which describes relationships in terms of breadth and depth of self-disclosure. Figure 3.2 pictures a student's self-disclosure

FIGURE 3.2 Sample Model of Social Penetration

in one relationship as an example. The first dimension of self-disclosure in this model involves the breadth of information volunteered—the range of subjects being discussed. For example, the breadth of disclosure in your relationship with a fellow worker will expand as you begin revealing information about your life away from the job as well as on-the-job details. The second dimension of disclosure is the depth of the information being volunteered—the shift from relatively impersonal messages to more personal ones.

Depending on the breadth and depth of information shared, a relationship can be defined as casual or intimate. In a casual relationship, the breadth may be great, but not the depth. A more intimate relationship is likely to have high depth in at least one area. The most intimate relationships are those in which disclosure is great in both breadth and depth. Altman and Taylor (1973) see the development of a relationship as a progression from the periphery of their model to its center, a process that typically occurs over time. Each of your personal relationships probably has a different combination of breadth of subjects and depth of revelation.

One way to classify the depth of disclosure is to look at the types of information that can be revealed. *Clichés* are ritualized, stock responses to social situations—virtually the opposite of self-disclosure: "How are you doing?" "Fine." Although hardly revealing, clichés can serve as a valuable kind of shorthand that makes it easy to keep the social wheels greased.

Another kind of message involves communicating *facts*. Not all factual statements qualify as self-disclosure. To qualify they must fit the criteria of being intentional, significant, and not otherwise known: "This isn't my first try at college. I dropped out a year ago with terrible grades." Disclosing personal facts like these often signals a desire to move a relationship to a deeper level of intimacy.

Opinions can be a kind of self-disclosure because they often reveal more about a person than facts alone do. Every time you offer a personal opinion (such as your political or religious beliefs, or an analysis of another person), you are giving others valuable information about yourself.

The fourth level of self-disclosure—and usually the most revealing one—involves the expression of *feelings*. At first glance, feelings might appear to be the same as opinions, but there's a big difference. "I don't think you're telling me about what's on your mind" is an opinion. Notice how much more we learn about the speaker by looking at three different feelings that could accompany this statement: "I don't think you're telling me what's on your mind . . .

and I'm suspicious."
and I'm angry."
and I'm hurt."

Awareness of Self-Disclosure: The Johari Window Model

Another way to illustrate how self-disclosure operates in communication is to look at a model called the **Johari Window**, developed by Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham (Janas, 2001; Luft, 1969).

Imagine a frame that contains everything there is to know about you: your likes and dislikes, your goals, your secrets, your needs—everything.

FIGURE 3.3 Johari Window

This frame could be divided into information you know about yourself and things you don't know. It could also be split into things others know about you and things they don't know. Figure 3.3 reflects these divisions.

Part 1 represents the information of which both you and the other person are aware. This part is your *open area*. Part 2 represents the *blind area:* information of which you are unaware but that the other person knows. You learn about information in the blind area primarily through feedback from others. Part 3 of the Johari Window represents your *hidden area:* information that you know but aren't willing to reveal to others. Items in this hidden area become public primarily through self-disclosure, which is the focus of this section. Part 4 of the Johari Window represents information that is *unknown* to both you and to others. We can deduce its existence because we are constantly discovering new things about ourselves. For example, it is not unusual to discover that you have an unrecognized talent, strength, or weakness. Items move from the unknown area into the open area when you share your insight, or into the hidden area, where it becomes a secret.

The relative size of each area in our personal Johari Windows changes from time to time according to our moods, the subject we are discussing, and our relationship with the other person. Despite these changes, a single Johari Window could represent most people's overall style of disclosure.

BENEFITS AND RISKS OF SELF-DISCLOSURE

By now it should be clear that neither all-out disclosure nor complete privacy is desirable. On one hand, self-disclosure is a key factor in relational development, and relationships suffer when people keep important information from one another (Erwin & Pressler, 2011). On the other hand, revealing deeply personal information can threaten the stability—or even the survival—of a relationship. Communication researchers use the term **privacy management** to describe the choices people make to reveal or conceal information about themselves (Bridge & Schrodt, 2013; Petronio, 2007). In the following pages, we outline both the benefits and risks of opening yourself to others.

Benefits of Disclosure

Modern culture, at least in the United States, places high value on self-disclosure (Marshall, 2008). There are a variety of reasons for self-disclosing (Duprez et al., 2015).

Catharsis Sometimes you might disclose information in an effort to "get it off your chest." Catharsis can indeed relieve the burden of pent-up emotions (Pennebaker, 1997), whether face-to-face or online (Vilhauer, 2009)—but when it's the *only* goal of disclosure, the results of opening up may not be good. Later in this chapter, you'll read guidelines for disclosing that increase the odds that you can achieve catharsis in a way that helps, instead of harming, relationships.

Self-Clarification It is often possible to clarify your beliefs, opinions, thoughts, attitudes, and feelings by talking about them with another person. This sort of gaining insight by "talking the problem out" occurs in many psychotherapies, but it also goes on in other relationships ranging from good friends to interaction with bartenders or hairstylists.

Self-Validation If you disclose information with the hope of seeking the listener's agreement ("I think I did the right thing"), you are seeking validation of your behavior—confirmation of a belief you hold about yourself. On a deeper level, this sort of self-validating disclosure seeks confirmation of important parts of your self-concept. For instance, self-validation is an important part of the "coming out" process through which LGBTQ people recognize their sexual orientation and choose to disclose this knowledge in their personal, family, and social lives (Manning, 2015).

Reciprocity A well-documented conclusion from research is that one person's act of self-disclosure increases the odds that the other person will reveal personal information (Sprecher et al., 2013). There is no guarantee that revealing personal information will trigger self-disclosures by others, but your own honesty can create a climate that makes the other person feel safer and perhaps even obligated to match your level of candor ("I've been bored with our relationship lately" might get a response of "Wow, me too!"). Reciprocity applies online as well as in person. It's one of the reasons for the success of online support groups, where people often feel safe to disclose once they've read what others have shared (Lewallen et al., 2014).

Impression Formation Sometimes we reveal personal information to make ourselves more attractive, and research shows that this strategy seems to work. One study revealed that both men's and women's attractiveness was associated with the amount of self-disclosure in conversations (Stiles et al., 1996). Consider a couple on their first date. It's not hard to imagine how one or both partners might share personal information to appear more sincere, interesting, sensitive, or curious about the other person. The same principle applies in other situations. A salesperson might say, "I'll be honest with you" primarily to show that she or he is on your side.

Relationship Maintenance and Enhancement Research demonstrates that we like people who disclose personal information to us. In fact, the relationship between self-disclosure and liking works in several directions: We like people who disclose personal information to us; we reveal more about ourselves to people we like; and we tend to like others more after we have disclosed to them (Dindia, 2000b, 2002).

Appropriate self-disclosure is positively related to marital satisfaction (Hess et al., 2007). Disclosing spouses give their relationships higher evaluations and have more positive expectations than do partners who disclose less (MacNeil & Byers, 2009). And studies have demonstrated that increased self-disclosure can improve troubled marriages (Laurenceau et al., 2005). With the guidance of a skilled counselor or therapist, partners can learn constructive ways to open up.

DARK SIDE OF COMMUNICATION

Talking Frankly About STDs

STD is an acronym that strikes fear in many, and it's often unmentioned in "polite company." But sexually transmitted diseases are a serious health issue, and talking about them candidly is an important component of responsible communication.

Here are some quick facts from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov/std):

- An estimated 110 million people in the United States have an STD, with 20 million new infections annually.
- Three STDs in particular—chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis—have been on the rise among young people in recent years.
- STDs can result in pain, cancer, infertility, dementia, and even death.

The CDC recommends "open and honest conversation" between sexual partners as a preventive measure. Communication researchers agree, but they know it's easier said than done. One study (Horan, 2016) found that 60 percent of sexually active college students had "acted deceptively" about disclosing their sexual history, even though most said they knew better. Students in another study who measured high in privacy concerns rarely if ever talked about their sexual history with partners (Nichols, 2012). These nondisclosers said their sexual history is "not information their partners were entitled to know" (p. 110).

An alternative to discussing sexual history is to ensure that both partners have been tested for STDs. HealthFinder.gov suggests phrases for approaching this delicate matter: "I really care about you and want to make sure we are both healthy"; "We can enjoy sex more if we know it's safe"; and "I've been tested for STDs—are you willing to do the same for me?"

It might be uncomfortable to start a conversation on such a personal matter, but as the CDC notes, "protecting your health is your responsibility."

Moral Obligation Sometimes we disclose personal information out of a sense of moral obligation. People who are HIV-positive, for example, are often faced with the choice of whether they should tell their health care providers and their partner. One study (Agne et al., 2000) found that patients typically did disclose their HIV status to their health care provider because they felt it was the responsible thing to do for themselves (to help fight their illness) and to protect the provider. Another study (Derlega et al., 2000) found that people who are HIV positive often see disclosing their status "as a duty" and as a way to educate the partner—as an obligation. See the Dark Side sidebar on this page about self-disclosure and STDs.

Risks of Self-Disclosure

Although the benefits of disclosing are certainly important, opening up can also involve risks that make the decision to disclose a difficult and sometimes painful one (Afifi & Caughlin, 2007). The risks of self-disclosure fall into several categories (Greene et al., 2006; Rosenfeld, 2000).

Rejection In answering the question that forms the title of his book, *Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?*, John Powell (1969) summed up the risks of disclosing: "I am afraid to tell you who I am because if I tell you who I am, you may not like who I am, and that's all I have." The fear of disapproval is powerful. Sometimes it is exaggerated and illogical, but there are real dangers in revealing personal information:

A: I'm starting to think of you as more than a friend. To tell the truth, I think I love you.
B: I think we should stop seeing each other.

Negative Impression Even if disclosure doesn't lead to total rejection, it can create a negative impression:

A: You know, I've never had a relationship with a woman that lasted more than a month.
B: Really? I wonder what that says about you.

Decrease in Relational Satisfaction Besides affecting others' opinions of you, disclosure can lead to a decrease in the satisfaction that comes from a relationship. Consider a scenario such as this where the incompatible wants and needs of each person become clear through disclosure:

A: Let's get together with Miguel and Jake on Saturday night.
B: To tell you the truth, I'm tired of seeing Miguel and Jake. I don't have much fun with them, and I think Jake is kind of a jerk.
A: But they're my best friends!

In his video blogs (such as *Whine About It* and *To Be Honest*), Matt Bellassai humorously describes how nice it would be to say whatever he wants, regardless of how it affects others. ***Are there times when you wish you could say what you're thinking without inhibition? What would be the interpersonal consequences of doing do?***

Loss of Influence Another risk of disclosure is a potential loss of influence in the relationship. Once you confess a secret weakness, your control over how the other person views you can be diminished:

A: I'm sorry I was so sarcastic. Sometimes I build myself up by putting you down.
B: Is that it? I'll never let you get away with that again!

Loss of Control Revealing something personal about yourself means losing control of the information. What might happen if the person tells others what you disclosed, people you prefer not know, or whom you would like to tell yourself? One study (Venetis et al., 2012) found that even solemn pledges from others to maintain your secret are often not kept.

A: I never really liked Leslie. I agreed to go out because it meant a good meal in a nice restaurant.
B: Really? Leslie would sure like to know that!

Hurting the Other Person Even if revealing hidden information leaves you feeling better, it might hurt or upset others. It's probably easy to imagine yourself in a situation like this:

A: Well, since you asked, I have felt less attracted to you lately. I know you can't help it when your skin breaks out, but it is kind of a turnoff.
B: I know! I don't see how you can stand me at all!

GUIDELINES FOR SELF-DISCLOSURE

Self-disclosure is a special kind of sharing that is not appropriate for every situation. Here are guidelines to help you recognize how to express yourself in a way that's rewarding for you and for the others involved (Derlega et al., 2011; Greene et al., 2006).

Is the Other Person Important to You?

There are several ways in which someone might be important. Perhaps you have an ongoing relationship deep enough so that sharing significant parts

On her album *Lemonade*, superstar Beyoncé disclosed feelings of betrayal, jealousy, and rage surrounding her troubled marriage to rapper Jay Z. While some viewed it as an airing of dirty laundry, most saw it as honest, assertive, and cathartic. ***Have you ever considered going public with painful feelings? Has your silence been the best choice?***

of yourself justifies keeping your present level of togetherness intact. Perhaps the person to whom you're considering disclosing is someone with whom you've previously related on a less personal level. Now you see a chance to grow closer, and disclosure may be the path toward developing that personal relationship.

Is the Risk of Disclosing Reasonable?

Most people intuitively calculate the potential benefits of disclosing against the risks of doing so (Afifi & Steuber, 2009). Even if the probable benefits are great, opening yourself up to almost certain rejection may be asking for trouble. For instance, it might be foolhardy to share your important feelings with someone you know is likely to betray your confidences or ridicule them. On the other hand, knowing that your partner will respect the information makes the prospect of speaking out more reasonable. This is true in both personal and professional relationships. See the At Work sidebar on page 81 for a discussion of the potential risks of revealing personal information on the job.

Is the Self-Disclosure Appropriate?

Some people have trouble with what's popularly known as "TMI"—that is, sharing "too much information" (Alter & Oppenheimer, 2009). In general, it's wise not to divulge personal secrets with strangers, on public social media postings, or in classroom discussions (Frisby & Sidelinger, 2013). Even students who appreciate self-disclosure from their teachers acknowledge that they don't want to hear too much, too often about their instructors' personal lives (Myers & Brann, 2009). Of course, it's also possible to *withhold* too much information—perhaps in a marital counseling session or at a doctor's appointment. The key is to recognize that there's a time and a place for engaging in, and refraining from, self-disclosure.

Is the Disclosure Reciprocated?

There's nothing quite as disconcerting as talking your heart out to someone, only to discover that the other person has yet to say anything to you that is half as revealing. You think to yourself, "What am I doing?" Unequal self-disclosure creates an unbalanced relationship, one with potential problems. This doesn't mean that you are obliged to match another person's revelations. What's important is that there is an appropriate balance of disclosure for maintaining each party's investment in the relationship.

Will the Effect Be Constructive?

Self-disclosure can be a vicious tool if it's not used carefully. Every person has a psychological beltline below which some topics can be extremely sensitive. It's important to consider the effects of your candor before opening up to others. Comments such as "I've always thought you were pretty unintelligent"

ASSESSING YOUR COMMUNICATION

Online and Offline Self-Disclosure

Assess your online and face-to-face self-disclosure by rating each of the following statements using a scale ranging from 1 to 7, with 1 = "strongly disagree" and 7 = "strongly agree." Consider inviting others who know you well to assess your disclosure by responding to the same statements about you.

When communicating using an online social networking site . . .

_____ **1.** I make frequent posts about myself.

_____ **2.** Posts I make about myself are often long and detailed.

_____ **3.** In posts about myself I let others know openly about who I really am.

_____ **4.** My posts contain a lot of highly personal information about my thoughts, feelings, relationships, and activities.

When communicating face to face . . .

_____ **5.** I often talk about myself.

_____ **6.** I usually talk about myself for fairly long periods of time.

_____ **7.** When I talk about myself I let others know openly about who I really am.

_____ **8.** My talk about myself contains a lot of highly personal information about my thoughts, feelings, relationships, and activities.

Adapted from Bateman, P. J., Pike, J. C., & Butler, B. S. (2011). To disclose or not: Publicness in social networking sites. *Information Technology & People*, *24*, 78–100.

For scoring information, see page 100 at the end of the chapter.

or "Last year I made love to your best friend" may sometimes resolve old business and thus be constructive, but they also can be devastating—to the listener, to the relationship, and to your self-esteem.

ALTERNATIVES TO SELF-DISCLOSURE

Although self-disclosure plays an important role in interpersonal relationships, it isn't the only type of communication available. To understand why complete honesty isn't always an easy or ideal choice, consider some familiar dilemmas:

- You have grown increasingly annoyed with some habits of the person you live with. You fear that bringing up this topic could lead to an unpleasant conversation and maybe even damage the relationship.

- Your friend, who is headed out the door for an important job interview, says, "I know I'll never get this job! I'm really not qualified, and besides I look terrible." You agree with your friend's assessment.
- You've just been given a large, extremely ugly lamp as a gift by a relative who visits your home often. How would you respond to the question, "Where will you put it?"

Although honesty is desirable in principle, it often has risky, potentially unpleasant consequences. It's tempting to sidestep situations in which self-disclosure would be difficult, but examples like the ones you just read indicate that avoidance isn't always possible. Research and personal experience show that communicators—even those with the best intentions—aren't always completely honest when they find themselves in situations when honesty would be uncomfortable (Ennis et al., 2008; Scott, 2010). Four common alternatives to self-disclosure are silence, lying, equivocation, and hinting. Let's take a closer look at each one.

Silence

One alternative to self-disclosure is to keep your thoughts and feelings to yourself. As the cartoon below shows, there are many times when keeping information to yourself can seem like the best approach, both for you and the other person. One study showed that in the workplace, withholding information is often seen as a better alternative than lying or engaging in deception (Dunleavy et al., 2010).

You can get a sense of how much you rely on silence instead of disclosing by keeping a record of when you do and don't express your opinions. You're likely to find that withholding thoughts and feelings is a common approach for you.

Zits: © 2004 Zits Partnership, Dist. by King Features

Lying

A **lie** is a deliberate attempt to hide or misrepresent the truth. Lying to gain unfair advantage over an unknowing victim seems clearly wrong, but another kind of mistruth—the "benevolent lie"—isn't so easy to dismiss as completely unethical. **Benevolent lies** are defined (at least by the people who tell them) as not being malicious—and perhaps they are even helpful to the person to whom they are told. You can almost certainly recall times when you have been less than truthful to avoid hurting someone you care for (for examples, see Dworkin, 2016).

Whether or not they are innocent, benevolent lies are certainly common. In several studies spanning four decades, a significant majority of people surveyed acknowledged that even in their closest relationships, there were times when lying was justified (DePaulo et al., 2009). Whereas many of the lies told to best friends and friends are benevolent, many of those told to acquaintances and strangers are self-serving (Ennis et al., 2008). Table 3.1 identifies various reasons for lying, adapted from Dunbar et al. (2016), Agosta et al. (2013), and other research cited in this section.

TABLE 3.1 Some Reasons for Lying

Reason	Example
Save face for others	"Don't worry—I'm sure nobody noticed that stain on your shirt."
Save face for self	"I wasn't looking at the files—I was accidentally in the wrong drawer."
Acquire resources	"Oh, *please* let me add this class. If I don't get in, I'll never graduate on time!"
Protect resources	"I'd like to lend you the money, but I'm short myself."
Initiate interaction	"Excuse me, I'm lost. Do you live around here?"
Be socially gracious	"No, I'm not bored—tell me more about your vacation."
Avoid conflict	"It's not a big deal. We can do it your way. Really."
Avoid interaction	"That sounds like fun, but I'm busy Saturday night."
Take leave	"Oh, look what time it is! I've got to run!"
Present a competent image	"Sure I understand. No problem."
Increase social desirability	"Yeah, I've done a fair amount of skiing."

Not all lies are equally devastating. We may be able to cope with "misdemeanor" lying (such as the ones in Table 3.1), but "felonies" are a serious threat—often leading to the end of a relationship. The lesson here is clear: Lying about major parts of your relationship can have the gravest of consequences. If preserving a relationship is important to you, then honesty—at least about important matters—really does appear to be the best policy. Chapter 9 will have more to say about repairing relationships that have been damaged by lies.

Equivocation

There are other alternatives to blatant truth-telling. When faced with difficult disclosure choices, communicators can—and often do—use **equivocation**: statements that are not literally false but cleverly avoid an unpleasant truth (Bello, 2005).

The value of equivocation becomes clear when you consider the alternatives. Consider the dilemma of what to say when you've been given an unwanted present—an ugly painting, for example—and the giver asks what you think of it. How can you respond? On one hand, you need to choose between telling the truth and lying. At the same time, you have a choice of whether to make your response clear or vague. Figure 3.4 displays these choices.

The underlying point of equivocal messages is usually understood by their recipients. One study (Bello & Edwards, 2005) explored how receivers interpreted equivocal statements, such as a friend calling your speech "interesting" instead of saying "You messed up." Besides regarding the equivocal statements as more polite, the recipients had no trouble discerning the intended meaning—that the speech was poor, to use our example.

Given the advantages of equivocation, it's not surprising that most people usually will choose to equivocate rather than tell a lie. In a series of experiments, subjects chose between telling a face-saving lie, the truth, and equivocating (Bavelas et al., 1990). Only 6 percent chose the lie, and between 3 percent and 4 percent chose the hurtful truth. By contrast, over 90 percent chose the equivocal response. People may say they prefer truth-telling to equivocating, but given the choice, they usually finesse the truth (Robinson et al., 1998).

Some forms of equivocation rely on telling partial truths (Rogers et al., 2017). Imagine that you had promised to be home right after work but instead went out for drinks with coworkers. Upon arriving home late, you might justify your tardiness by saying, "One of my work friends needed to talk about a personal problem." Even if your happy hour conversation included such a discussion, this technically honest statement is clearly an act of deception.

FIGURE 3.4 Dimensions of Truthfulness and Equivocation

Communicators who hedge the truth view this strategy as less ethically suspect than more blatant forms of deception. As one researcher put it (Gino, 2016), telling partial truth "allows them to maintain an image of themselves as honest and trustworthy individuals." Technically speaking, they reason, no lie was told. But when those on the receiving end of such statements discover the full story, they are just as offended as if they had been the target of an outright falsehood (McGregor, 2017).

Hinting

Hints are more direct than equivocal statements. Whereas an equivocal message isn't necessarily aimed at changing another's behavior, a hint seeks to get the desired response from the other person. Some hints are designed to save the receiver from embarrassment (Motley, 1992):

Direct Statement	Face-Saving Hint
You're too overweight to be ordering dessert.	These desserts are terribly overpriced.
I'm too busy to continue with this conversation. I wish you would let me go.	I know you're busy; I'd better let you go.

Other hints are less concerned with protecting the receiver than with saving the sender from embarrassment:

Direct Statement	Face-Saving Hint
Please don't smoke here; it bothers me.	I'm pretty sure that smoking isn't permitted here.
I'd like to invite you out for lunch, but I don't want to risk a "no" answer to my invitation.	Gee, it's almost lunch time. Have you ever eaten at that new Italian restaurant around the corner?

The success of a hint depends on the other person's ability to pick up the unexpressed message. Your subtle remarks might go right over the head of an insensitive receiver, or one who chooses not to respond to them. One study found that when closeted gays and lesbians made hints about needing social support, their indirect messages were often ignored, and they didn't get the help they needed (Williams et al., 2016). If you find that your hints aren't getting through, you have the choice to be more direct or withdraw without risk.

The Ethics of Evasion

It's easy to see why people often choose hints, equivocations, and benevolent lies instead of self-disclosure. These strategies provide a way to manage difficult situations that is easier than the alternatives for both the

speaker and the receiver of the message. In this sense, successful liars, equivocators, and hinters can be said to possess a certain kind of communicative competence. On the other hand, there *are* times when honesty is the right approach, even if it's painful. At times like these, evaders could be viewed as lacking either the competence or the integrity to handle a situation effectively.

Are hints, benevolent lies, and equivocations ethical alternatives to self-disclosure? Some of the examples in these pages suggest the answer is a qualified "yes." Many social scientists and philosophers agree. For example, researchers David Buller and Judee Burgoon (1994) argue that the morality of a speaker's motives for lying ought to be judged, not the deceptive act itself.

Another approach is to consider whether the effects of a lie will be worth the deception. Ethicist Sissela Bok (1999) offers some circumstances where deception may be justified: doing good, avoiding harm, and protecting a larger truth. One example is when a patient asks, "How am I doing?" If a nurse perceives that telling the truth could be harmful, it would violate the obligation to "do good and avoid harm," and honesty would be less important than caring (Tuckett, 2005). Perhaps the right questions to ask, then, are whether an indirect message is truly in the interests of the receiver and whether this sort of evasion is the only effective way to behave. Bok suggests another way to check the justifiability of a lie: Imagine how others would respond if they knew what you were really thinking or feeling. Would they accept your reasons for not disclosing?

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Objective 3.1 Describe how the self-concept is subjective and is shaped by, and consequently affects, communication with others.

The self-concept is a relatively stable set of perceptions individuals hold about themselves. It begins to develop soon after birth, being shaped by the appraisals of significant others and by social comparisons with reference groups. The self-concept is subjective and can vary substantially from the way a person is perceived by others. Although the self may evolve over time, the self-concept resists change.

A self-fulfilling prophecy occurs when a person's expectations of an event and subsequent behavior influence the event's outcome. One type of prophecy consists of predictions by others, whereas another category is self-imposed.

Q: Identify your own self-concept and identify the messages from others that have shaped it.

Q: Describe how self-fulfilling prophecies (both self-imposed and from others) affect the ways you communicate.

Objective 3.2 Explain how we manage impressions in person and online to enhance our presenting image.

Impression management consists of an individual's strategic communication designed to influence others' perceptions. It aims at presenting one or more faces to others, which may be different from private, spontaneous behavior that occurs outside of others' presence. Communicating through mediated channels can enhance a person's ability to manage impressions. Because each person has a variety of faces that she or he can reveal, choosing which one to present is a central concern of competent communicators.

Q: Describe the various identities you attempt to present to others and the strategies you use (in person and via mediated channels) to construct them.

Objective 3.3 Identify an optimal level of self-disclosure and nondisclosure in effective relationships.

Self-disclosure consists of honest, revealing messages about the self that are intentionally directed toward others. Disclosing communication contains information that is generally unavailable via other sources. The percentage of messages that are truly self-disclosing is relatively low. A number of factors govern whether a communicator will be judged as being a high- or low-level discloser.

Two models for describing self-disclosure are the social penetration model and the Johari Window model. The social penetration model describes two dimensions of self-disclosure: breadth and depth. The Johari Window illustrates the amount of information that an individual reveals to others, hides, is blind to, and is unaware of.

Communicators disclose personal information for a variety of reasons. There also are several reasons to choose not to self-disclose, some of which serve primarily the interests of the nondiscloser, and others of which are intended to benefit the target. When deciding whether to disclose, communicators should consider a variety of factors detailed in the chapter.

Four alternatives to revealing self-disclosures are silence, lies (both benevolent and self-serving), equivocations, and hints. These may be ethical alternatives to self-disclosure; however, whether they are or not depends on the speaker's motives and the effects of the deception.

Q: Use the social penetration model and Johari Window model to represent the level of disclosure involving an important topic in one of your important relationships.

Q: Compose responses to a situation that reflect varying degrees of candor and equivocation. Choose the response that seems most appropriate and effective for the situation.

KEY TERMS

Benevolent lie (95)
Equivocation (96)
Face (78)
Facework (78)
Impression management (77)
Johari Window (87)
Lie (95)
Perceived self (78)
Presenting self (78)
Privacy management (88)
Reference groups (72)
Reflected appraisal (72)
Self-concept (70)
Self-disclosure (86)
Self-esteem (70)
Self-fulfilling prophecy (76)
Significant other (72)
Social comparison (72)
Social penetration model (86)

ACTIVITIES

1. With a group of classmates, compile a list of reference groups you use to define your self-concepts. You can recognize them by answering several questions:

a. Select one area in which you compare yourselves to others. In what area is the comparison made? (For example, is the comparison based on wealth, intelligence, or social skill?)

b. In the selected area, ask yourselves, "Which people am I better or worse than?"

c. In the selected area, ask yourselves, "Which people am I the same as or different from?"

What is the effect of using these groups as a basis for judging yourselves? How might you view yourselves differently if you used other reference groups as a basis for comparison?

2. Share with your classmates two incidents in which self-fulfilling prophecies you have imposed on yourself have affected your communication. Explain how each of these predictions shaped your behavior, and describe how you might have behaved differently if you had made a different prediction. Next, describe two incidents in which you imposed self-fulfilling prophecies on others. What effect did your prediction have on these people's actions?

3. As a class, construct a gallery of public and private selves. Each student should fold a piece of paper to create two areas. On the top half, draw an image to reflect your private self, and write 10 words that describe the most important characteristics of the private self. (Don't put names on these papers—anonymity is important.) On the bottom half, draw an image that captures the public self you try to show the world, and write 10 words that describe important parts of that public image.

Once drawings are finished, display the images in a gallery that all class members can examine. What patterns emerge regarding the similarity or difference between public and private selves?

4. Recall recent situations in which you used each of the following evasive approaches: benevolent lying, equivocating, and hinting. Write an anonymous written description of each situation on a separate sheet of paper. Submit the cases to a panel of "judges" (most likely fellow students) who will use the criteria of justifiable motives and desirable effects to evaluate the morality of this deception. Invite the "judges" to consider how they would feel if they knew someone used these evasive approaches with them.

5. Use the guidelines on pages 91–93 to develop one scenario in which you *might* reveal a self-disclosing message. Share a message of this type with a group of your classmates and discuss the risks and benefits of sharing the message.

SCORING FOR ASSESSING YOUR COMMUNICATION (PAGE 93)

Add responses to items 1 and 2. This is your *Amount of Online Disclosure* score: _____.
Add responses to items 3 and 4. This is your *Depth of Online Disclosure* score: _____.
Add responses to items 5 and 6. This is your *Amount of Face-to-Face Disclosure* score: _____.
Add responses to items 7 and 8. This is your *Depth of Face-to-Face Disclosure* score: _____.

Amount of Online Disclosure score: Scores above 6 indicate a willingness to disclose more than average when communicating via a social networking site.

Depth of Online Disclosure score: Scores above 5 indicate a willingness to disclose at higher levels of depth or intimacy than average when communicating via a social networking site.

Amount of Face-to-Face Disclosure score: Scores above 7 indicate a willingness to disclose more than average when communicating face to face.

Depth of Face-to-Face Disclosure score: Scores above 6 indicate a willingness to disclose more than average when communicating face to face.

4

Perceiving Others

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

4.1 Understand the subjective nature of perceiving interpersonal messages and relationships.

4.2 Identify the variety of influences on interpersonal perception.

4.3 Recognize how common tendencies in perception shape interpersonal communication.

4.4 Use perception checking and adjust attitudes to enhance empathy with communication partners.

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INTERNATIONAL STATESMAN Nelson Mandela was fond of saying, "Where you stand depends on where you sit." He knew the stances he took on issues were framed by his unique vantage point in life. Likewise, who you are and how you were raised are unique to you, which means that *no one perceives the world exactly the way you do.* This essential principle significantly affects interpersonal relations, as communicators attempt to share meaning from perspectives that are often quite different.

Just like the cubes in Figure 4.1, every interpersonal situation can be seen from multiple points of view. Take a minute to study that figure. How many ways can you discover to view this image? If you only see one or two, keep looking; Figure 4.2 shows four ways. The point of this exercise is that making quick and accurate sense of even simple perspective drawings is a difficult task. With that in mind, you can begin to understand the challenge involved in imagining the perspectives of other human beings, who are far more complex and multidimensional.

In this chapter, we provide tools for communicating in the face of perceptual differences. We begin by explaining that reality is constructed through communication. Then we introduce some of the many reasons why the world appears so different to each of us. After examining the perceptual factors that make understanding so difficult, we look at tools for bridging the perceptual gap.

FIGURE 4.1 How many different ways can you view two cubes?

THE PERCEPTION PROCESS

How do our perceptions affect our communication with others? We begin to answer these questions by taking a look at the way we make sense of the world.

REALITY IS CONSTRUCTED

Most social scientists agree that the world we know isn't "out there." Rather, we create our reality with others through communication (Kotchemidova,

FIGURE 4.2 Four ways of viewing Figure 4.1.

2010). This may seem hard to accept until we recognize that there are two levels of reality, which have been labeled "first order" and "second order" (Nardone & Watzlawick, 2005; Watzlawick, 1984, 1990). **First-order realities** are physically observable qualities of a thing or situation (e.g., your neighbor speaks with an accent). By contrast, **second-order realities** involve our *attaching meaning* to first-order things or situations (e.g., the accent makes her sound exotic). Second-order realities don't reside in objects or events, but rather in our minds.

Life runs most smoothly when we share second-order realities. For example:

First-order reality:	A job interviewer asks if you are married.
Shared second-order reality:	This is a reasonable question for the situation.

Communication becomes more problematic when we have different second-order realities. For example:

First-order reality:	A job interviewer asks if you are married.
Your second-order reality:	The question has nothing to do with the job and is inappropriate.
Interviewer's second-order reality:	I am trying to make conversation.

In addition, many communication problems can arise when we mistake second-order (constructed) realities for first-order ones.

In this chapter, we explore factors that cause us to experience and make sense of the world in different ways. Perhaps more important, we introduce you to some communication tools that can help bridge the gap between differing perceptions, and in so doing improve relationships.

Zits: © 2001 Zits Partnership, Dist. by King Features

We perceive one another through many personal filters. ***Think of another's communication behavior that affected you strongly. How else might you organize and interpret information related to it?***

STEPS IN THE PERCEPTION PROCESS

We attach meanings to our experiences in four steps: selection, organization, interpretation, and negotiation.

Selection

Because we're exposed to more input than we can possibly manage, the first step in perception is **selection**, or determining which data we will attend to. Several factors cause us to notice some messages while ignoring others (Coon, 2009):

- *Intensity*. Something that is louder, larger, or brighter stands out. Someone who laughs or talks loudly at a party attracts more attention (not always favorable) than do quieter guests.
- *Repetition*. Repetitious stimuli can also attract our attention. Just think of a quiet but steadily dripping faucet.
- *Contrast or change*. Unchanging people or things are less noticeable. For example, we may appreciate our significant others more when they leave.

Later in this chapter, we look at a variety of other factors—physiological, psychological, social, and cultural—that lead us to pay attention to certain people and events.

Organization

After selecting information from the environment, the next stage is **organization**, or arranging it in some meaningful way (out of many possibilities) to help make sense of the world. We organize using *perceptual schema*, or cognitive frameworks (Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2001).

We use various types of schema to classify others, including the following (Freeman & Ambady, 2011):

- *Physical* (e.g., beautiful or plain, heavy or thin, young or old)
- *Role-based* (e.g., student, attorney, spouse)
- *Interaction-based* (e.g., friendly, helpful, aloof, sarcastic)
- *Psychological* (e.g., confident, insecure, happy, neurotic)

Once we have selected an organizing scheme to classify people, we use it to make generalizations about members of the groups who fit our categories. For example, if you are especially aware of a person's attractiveness, you might be alert to the differences in the way beautiful and plain people are treated (more on this in Chapter 6). If religion plays an important part in your life, you might think of members of your faith differently than you do others. We then organize our observations into generalizations ("Women tend to . . ."; "Teachers usually . . ."; "Nervous people often . . ."). There's nothing wrong with generalizations about groups as long as they are accurate. But overgeneralizations (typically involving descriptors such as "always" and "never") can lead to problems of stereotyping, which you'll read about in a few pages.

We also can organize specific communication transactions in different ways, and these organizational schemes can have a powerful effect on our relationships. Communication theorists use the term **punctuation** to describe the determination of causes and effects in a series of interactions (Watzlawick et al., 1967). You can begin to understand how punctuation operates by visualizing a running quarrel between a husband and wife. Notice that the order in which each partner punctuates this cycle affects how the dispute looks. The husband begins by blaming the wife: "I withdraw because you're so demanding." The wife organizes the situation differently, starting with the husband: "I demand so much because you're withdrawing." These kinds of demand–withdraw arguments are common in intimate relationships (Reznik & Roloff, 2011; Schrodt et al., 2014). Once the cycle gets rolling, it is impossible to say which accusation is accurate, as Figure 4.3 indicates. The answer depends on how the sequence is punctuated.

FIGURE 4.3 The way a communication sequence is punctuated affects its perceived meaning. Which comes first, the demanding or the withdrawing?

Anyone who has seen two children argue about "who started it" can understand that haggling over causes and effects isn't likely to solve a conflict. In fact, assigning blame will probably make matters worse (Caughlin & Huston, 2002). Rather than argue about whose punctuation of an event is correct, it's more productive to recognize that a dispute can look different to each person and then move on to the more important question of "What can we do to make things better?"

Interpretation

Once we have selected and organized our perceptions, we interpret them in a way that makes some sort of sense. **Interpretation**—attaching meaning to sense data—plays a role in virtually every interpersonal act. Is the person who smiles at you across a crowded room interested in romance or simply being polite? Is a friend's kidding a sign of affection or irritation? Should you take an invitation to "drop by any time" literally or not?

Several factors cause us to interpret a person's behavior in one way or another. For example:

- *Relational satisfaction*. A behavior that seems positive when you are happy with a partner might seem completely different when the relationship isn't satisfying (Luo et al., 2010). For example, couples in unsatisfying relationships are more likely than satisfied partners to blame one another when things go wrong (Diamond & Hicks, 2012). And the opposite also holds true: Partners in a satisfying relationship are likely to view each other more benevolently than accurately (Segrin et al., 2009).
- *Expectation*. If you go into a conversation expecting a hostile attitude, you're likely to hear a negative tone in the other person's voice—even if that tone isn't there (Hample et al., 2007). We talk more about how expectations affect perception later in this chapter.
- *Personal experience*. If you've been taken advantage of by landlords in the past, you might be skeptical about reclaiming your cleaning deposit.
- *Personality*. A study found that people with cold (relative to warm) dispositions have difficulty interpreting and labeling the emotions of others (Moeller et al., 2012). The researchers suggest that this deficiency can contribute to poorer social relationships for those with cold personalities.

FOCUS ON RESEARCH

Online Channels Affect Perception

You've been asked to come up with a list of tips for first-year college students. As you work on this task with an assigned stranger, that person says to you, "I bankrupted my checking account my freshman year." Later that person mentions, "My parents got divorced two years ago." How would you perceive those comments? Researchers at Cornell University believe your interpretation would be affected by whether the conversation took place in person or online.

Previous research has shown that people tend to engage in more self-disclosure via social media than they do face to face. This study focused on *perceptions* of such disclosures. Participants interpreted others' self-revelations as more personal and intimate when they read them online than when they heard them in person. They would then reciprocate, offering more of their own disclosures online than they would face to face.

The study lends support to the hyperpersonal nature of mediated communication discussed in Chapter 1. When cues are reduced and we see only typed words, we may read more into those comments than we would if they were delivered in person.

Jiang, L. C., Bazarova, N. N., & Hancock, J. T. (2013). From perception to behavior: Disclosure reciprocity and the intensification of intimacy in computer-mediated communication. *Communication Research, 40,* 125–143.

- *Assumptions about human behavior.* Do you assume people are lazy and dislike work, or do you believe people generally exercise self-direction and self-control? Imagine the differences in a boss who assumes workers fit the first description versus the second (Sager, 2008).

Note that the selection, organization, and interpretation phases of perception can occur in differing sequences. For example, a parent's or babysitter's past interpretations (such as "Jason is a troublemaker") can influence future selections (his behavior becomes especially noticeable) and the organization of events (when there's a fight, the assumption is that Jason started it). As with all communication, perception is an ongoing process in which it is hard to pin down beginnings and endings.

Negotiation

In Chapter 1 you read that meaning is created both *in* and *among* people. So far our discussion has focused on the inner components of perception—selection, organization, and interpretation—that take place in each person's mind. Now we need to examine the part of our sense-making that occurs *among* people. **Negotiation** is the process by which communicators influence each other's perceptions.

Negotiation can operate in subtle ways. For example, it's rare to draw a conclusion about something or someone without comparing notes with others. Imagine you think a person you just met is attractive, and you mention this impression to friends. If you hear negative appraisals from them ("I don't find that person attractive"), you might shift your initial perception—maybe not radically, but at least a bit. In one study that examined this process, college students rated the attractiveness of models in

a series of photos (Yang & Lee, 2014). Those who were able to see others' evaluations of the same photos slowly shifted their ratings to match the consensus. This finding suggests that beauty isn't just in the eye of the (individual) beholder—it's in the eyes of the (negotiating) beholders.

Another way to explain negotiation is to view interpersonal communication as the exchange of stories. **Narratives** are the stories we use to describe our personal worlds (Bromberg, 2012; Langellier & Peterson, 2006). Just as the boxes in Figure 4.1 on page 104 can be viewed in several ways, virtually every interpersonal situation can be described by more than one narrative. These narratives often differ in their casting of characters as "heroes" and "villains" (Aleman, 2005). For instance, consider a conflict between a boss and employee. If you ask the employee to describe the situation, she might depict the manager as a "heartless bean counter" while she sees herself as a worker who "always gets the job done." The manager's narrative might cast the roles quite differently: the "fair boss" versus the "clock watcher who wants to leave early." Similarly, stepmothers and mothers-in-law who see themselves as "helpful" might be portrayed as "meddlesome" in the narratives of stepdaughters and daughters-in-law (Christian, 2005; Sandel, 2004).

When our narratives clash with those of others, we can either hang on to our own point of view and refuse to consider anyone else's (usually not productive), or try to negotiate a narrative that creates at least some common ground. Shared narratives provide the best chance for smooth communication. For example, romantic partners who celebrate their successful struggles against relational obstacles are happier than those who don't have this shared appreciation (Flora & Segrin, 2000). Likewise, couples that agree about the important turning points in their relationships are more satisfied than those who have different views of which incidents were most important (Baxter & Pittman, 2001). Counselors even use "narrative therapy" to help partners revise and renew their identity as a couple (Kim et al., 2012b).

Shared narratives don't have to be accurate to be powerful (Martz et al., 1998). Couples who report being happily married after 50 or more years seem to collude in a relational narrative that doesn't always jibe with the facts (Miller et al., 2006). They agree that they rarely have conflict, although objective analysis reveals that they have had their share of disagreements and challenges. Without overtly deciding to do so, they choose to blame outside forces or unusual circumstances for problems, instead of attributing responsibility to one another. They offer the most charitable interpretations of one another's behavior, believing that their spouse acts with good intentions when things don't go well. And their narratives usually have happy endings (Frost, 2013). Examining this research, Judy Pearson (2000) asks the following:

> Should we conclude that happy couples have a poor grip on reality? Perhaps they do, but is the reality of one's marriage better known by outside onlookers than by the players themselves? The conclusion is evident. One key to a long happy marriage is to tell yourself and others that you have one and then to behave as though you do! (p. 186)

INFLUENCES ON PERCEPTION

A variety of factors influence how we select, organize, interpret, and negotiate data about others. The available information affects our perceptual judgments, as do physiological, cultural and social, and psychological factors.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

We can only make sense of what we know, and none of us knows everything about even the closest people in our lives. When new information becomes available, perceptions of others change. If you see your instructor only when she's teaching in the classroom, your conclusions about her will be based solely on her behaviors in that role. You might change your perception if you observe her in the roles of rush-hour driver, concertgoer, or grocery shopper.

We often gain access to new information about others when their roles overlap. Consider how that might occur at an office party. A person's "office" and "party" roles are usually quite different—so at an offsite work celebration, you may see behaviors you hadn't expected. Similarly, when your sweetheart takes you home to meet the family, you might get to watch your partner playing a "spoiled son" or "princess daughter" role. If you've ever said, "I saw a whole new side of you tonight," chances are it's because you gained access to information you didn't have before.

Social media can provide new information that affects perceptions. That's why job hunters are encouraged to clean up their online profiles and be careful to manage the impressions they might make (Kluemper et al., 2012). It's also why children and parents sometimes don't want to be Facebook friends with each other (Child & Westermann, 2013), which we discuss further in Chapter 10. Some roles are best kept private—or at least played to a select audience.

Watch and Discuss

Look up and watch the video "All That We Share" (in Danish with English subtitles).

1) Consider how we *organize* and *interpret* information about others based on the "box" we see them in.
2) Discuss how *access to new information* and new "boxes" can help break down walls and build relationships.

PHYSIOLOGICAL INFLUENCES

Sometimes differing perspectives come from our physical environment and the ways that our bodies differ from others.

The Senses

The differences in how each of us sees, hears, tastes, touches, and smells stimuli can affect interpersonal relationships (Croy et al., 2013). Consider a few examples arising from physiological differences:

"Turn down that music! It's giving me a headache."
"It's not too loud. If I turn it down, it will be impossible to hear it."

"It's freezing in here."
"Are you kidding? We'll suffocate if you turn up the heat!"

"Why don't you pass that truck? The highway is clear for half a mile."
"I can't see that far, and I'm not going to get us killed."

Age

We experience the world differently throughout our lifetimes. Age alters not just our bodies but our perspectives. Consider, for instance, how you've viewed your parents through the years. When you were a child, you probably thought they were all-knowing and flawless. As a teen, you may have viewed them as old-fashioned and mean. In adulthood, many people begin to regard their parents as knowledgeable and perhaps even wise. Although your parents have probably changed over time, it's likely that your *perception* of them has changed far more than they have. A tongue-in-cheek observation attributed to Mark Twain puts it this way: "When I was a boy of fourteen, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be twenty-one, I was astonished at how much he had learned in seven years."

Health and Fatigue

Recall the last time you came down with a cold, flu, or some other ailment. Health can have a strong impact on how you perceive and relate to others. A romantic overture doesn't sound appealing when you have a headache, and a night on the town with friends is more enjoyable when your muscles aren't aching. It's good to realize that someone else may be behaving differently because of illness. In the same way, it's important to let others know when you feel ill so they can give you the understanding you need.

Likewise, fatigue can affect relationships. People who are sleep deprived, for example, perceive time intervals as longer than they really are (Miró et al., 2003). One study found that when married couples don't sleep well, they have more negative perceptions of each other the following day, leading to more interpersonal discord (Seidman, 2011). Toward that end, a good night's sleep is an invaluable asset for managing interpersonal conflict (Gordon & Chen, 2014).

Biological Cycles

Are you a "morning person" or a "night person"? Each of us has a daily cycle in which all sorts of changes constantly occur, including variations in body temperature, sexual drive, alertness, and tolerance to stress (Koukkari & Sothern, 2006) and to pain (Jankowski, 2013). These cycles can affect the way we relate to each other. For example, you are probably better off avoiding prickly topics in the morning with someone who is not a "morning person."

Hunger

Your own experience probably confirms that being hungry (and getting grumpy) or having overeaten (and getting tired) affects how we interact with others. For example, teenagers who reported that their family did not get enough food to eat were almost three times as likely to have been suspended from school, almost twice as likely to have difficulty getting along with others, and four times as likely to have no friends (Alaimo et al., 2001). Although the exact nature of the causes and effects in this study is hard to pin down, one thing is clear: Hunger can affect our perception and communication.

The documentary *Life, Animated* tells the story of Owen Suskind, a young man who was unable to speak as a child. He and his family discovered that viewing Disney classics such as *The Little Mermaid* and *The Lion King* helped him understand social cues and reconnect with the world around him. ***How have neurobehavioral challenges shaped your own or others' perceptions and communication?***

Neurobehavioral Challenges

Some differences in perception are rooted in neurology. For instance, people with ADHD (attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder) are easily distracted from tasks and have difficulty delaying gratification (Goldstein, 2008; Tripp et al., 2007). It's easy to imagine how those with ADHD might find a long lecture boring and tedious, whereas others are fascinated by the same lecture (Von Briesen, 2007). People with bipolar disorder experience significant mood swings in which their perceptions of events, friends, family members, and even attempts at social support shift dramatically (Doherty & MacGeorge, 2013). The National Institute of Mental Health (2013) estimates that between 5 million and 7 million Americans are affected by these two disorders alone—and there are many other neurobehavioral conditions that influence our perceptions.

PSYCHOLOGICAL INFLUENCES

Along with physiology, our psychological state also influences the way we perceive others.

Mood

Our emotional state strongly influences how we view people and events and therefore how we communicate (Lount, 2013). An early experiment using hypnotism dramatically demonstrated the influence of mood on perception (Lebula & Lucas, 1945). Each subject viewed the same series of six pictures several times, each time having been put in a different mood. The descriptions of the pictures differed radically depending on the emotional state of the subject. For example, these are descriptions by one subject in various emotional states while describing a picture of children digging in a swampy area:

> *Happy mood:* "It looks like fun, reminds me of summer. That's what life is for, working out in the open, really living—digging in the dirt, planting, watching things grow."
> *Anxious mood:* "They're going to get hurt or cut. There should be someone older there who knows what to do in case of an accident. I wonder how deep the water is."
> *Critical mood:* "Pretty horrible land. There ought to be something more useful for kids of that age to do instead of digging in that stuff. It's filthy and dirty and good for nothing."

Although there's a strong relationship between mood and happiness, it's not clear which comes first: the perceptual outlook or the amount of relational satisfaction. There is some evidence that perception leads to satisfaction (Fletcher et al., 1987), and some that satisfaction drives positive perceptions (Luo et al., 2010). In other words, the attitude/expectation we bring to a situation shapes our level of happiness or unhappiness. Once

started, this process can create a spiral. If you're happy about your relationship, you will be more likely to interpret your partner's behavior in a charitable way. This, in turn, can lead to greater happiness. Of course, the same process can work in the opposite direction. One study revealed that spouses who felt uncertain about the status of their marriage saw relational threats in conversations that seemed quite ordinary to outsiders (Knobloch et al., 2007).

One remedy to serious distortions—and unnecessary conflicts—is to monitor your own moods. If you're aware of being especially critical or sensitive, you can avoid overreacting to others (and you can warn others: "This isn't a good time for me to discuss this with you—I'm a bit cranky right now").

Self-Concept

Another psychological factor that influences perception is self-concept (Hinde et al., 2001). One study demonstrated that the self-concept was the most important factor in perceiving teasing as friendly or hostile (Alberts et al., 1996). Another study showed that perceiving oneself as funny is related to perceiving others as funny (Bosacki, 2013). As a third example of self-concept's importance in perception, children who have a low opinion of themselves are more likely to see themselves as victims of bullying, both in their classrooms and online (Katzer et al., 2009; Kowalski & Limber, 2013). As discussed in Chapter 3, the way we think and feel about ourselves strongly influences how we interpret others' behavior.

SOCIAL INFLUENCES

Within a society, our personal point of view plays a strong role in shaping perceptions. Social scientists have developed **standpoint theory** to describe how a person's position in a society shapes her or his view of society in general and of specific individuals (Litwin & Hallstein, 2007; Wood, 2005). Standpoint theory is most often applied to the difference between the perspectives of privileged social groups and people who have less power (Kinefuchi & Orbe, 2008), and to the perspectives of women and men (Dougherty, 2001). Unless one has been disadvantaged, it can be difficult to imagine how the world might look to someone who has been treated badly because of race, ethnicity, gender, biological sex, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic class. After some reflection, though, you probably can understand how being marginalized can make the world seem like a very different place.

We look now at how some specific types of societal roles affect an individual's perception.

Sex and Gender Roles

Although people often use the terms *sex* and *gender* as if they're identical, there is an important difference (Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2014). *Sex* refers to biological characteristics of a male or female, whereas **gender** refers to the social and psychological dimensions of masculine and feminine behavior.

The TV drama *Transparent* captures the struggles faced by Maura Pfefferman (Jeffrey Tambor), a transgender woman going through the transition later in life. Maura's ex and her spoiled children make the process especially difficult. ***What sex and gender roles govern communication in your relationships?***

Males and females can be more or less masculine, more or less feminine, or have both masculine *and* feminine characteristics. A person with relatively equal masculine and feminine characteristics is referred to as **androgynous**. In general, 80 percent of people see themselves as either sex typed (masculine male/feminine female) or androgynous (Choi et al., 2009).

A large body of research shows that men and women perceive the world differently, for reasons ranging from genes to neurology to hormones (Becker et al., 2007; Schroeder, 2010). For instance, one study found that women are better than men at reading emotion in facial expressions, which is consistent with research showing that women are generally more perceptive about interpreting others' nonverbal cues (Rennels & Cummings, 2013; see also Hall & Andrzejewski, 2017). However, the authors noted that these differences weren't in place at infancy, and it's hard to know whether nature or nurture was responsible for the development of this skill over time. Even cognitive researchers who focus on biological differences between men and women acknowledge that societal gender roles affect perception dramatically (Halpern, 2000).

Sex role stereotypes can influence perception. In one experiment (Matthews, 2016), college debate judges were asked to assess the aggressiveness of participants in a fictional debate round. Even though all the debaters used similar language, the judges perceived the female debaters as significantly more aggressive than the males. In a different study (Kingsbury & Coplan, 2016), participants perceived ambiguous text messages as more negative when the hypothetical sender was identified as female—particularly if the recipient was male. These findings suggest that whether they mean to or not, communicators often see the world through the lens of societal role constructs.

"How is it gendered?"

Gender can sometimes influence perception more than biological sex does (Baglan, 1993). For instance, a study on perceptions of effective teacher behavior (Aylor, 2003) found that gender was superior to biological sex as a predictor. Masculine individuals, regardless of their biological sex, perceived good teaching as a teacher's use of communication to manage students' behavior (e.g., the teacher's being persuasive and managing conversations). Feminine individuals perceived good teaching as a teacher's use of communication to manage students' feelings (e.g., supporting students' egos and helping students realize their mistakes).

One way to appreciate the impact of gender roles on perception is to consider the experiences

@work Sexual Harassment and Perception

What does a hand on the shoulder mean when making a workplace request? What if it lasts for more than a few seconds? Or how about the statement, "You need to do more around here—*much* more." Every student of communication knows that messages have no meaning until people give them meaning—and that's largely a matter of perception. Understanding interpersonal perception is thus critical to addressing the challenging issue of sexual harassment.

Although there are clear-cut examples of outright harassment, differing perceptions explain many other incidents. For example, women are more likely than men to perceive behaviors as sexual harassment, and people with sexist attitudes tend to see less evidence of sexual harassment around them (Bitton & Shaul, 2013). Cultural background also shapes perceptions of harassment (Merkin, 2012; Toker, 2016). People from cultures with high power distance (see Chapter 2) are less likely to perceive harassment from higher-ups than are those from places with low power distance.

The meanings attributed to essentially the same behaviors change for workers as they age and gain new experiences. Younger employees—both men and women—are less likely than older people to regard sexualized interaction such as flirting and sexual joking as harassment (Blackstone et al., 2014).

Findings like these help explain why some people find sexual harassment where others see nothing offensive. That's where clear communication comes in: When members of an organization share their own perceptions and better understand those of others, we can expect fewer misunderstandings and greater job satisfaction. The perception-checking skills described in this chapter can be used to help the cause.

of transgender individuals. Many report seeing the world differently after shifting gender identities (Alter, 2016). One trans man said he's learning new communication rules: "I'm still trying to figure out all of the different secret codes that guys use to talk to each other and to make friendships," he says. "I don't know what that punch on the arm meant."

Occupational Roles

The kind of work we do also governs our view of the world. Imagine five people taking a walk through a park. One, a botanist, is fascinated by the variety of trees and plants. Another, a zoologist, is on the lookout for interesting animals. The third, a meteorologist, keeps an eye on the sky, noticing changes in the weather. The fourth, a psychologist, is totally unaware of the goings-on of nature, concentrating instead on the interaction among the people in the park. The fifth, a pickpocket, quickly takes advantage of the others' absorption to collect their wallets. There are two lessons in this little story: The first, of course, is to watch your wallet carefully. The second is that our occupational roles frequently govern our perceptions.

An experiment in the early 1970s dramatically illustrated how occupational roles shape perception. Stanford psychologist Philip Zimbardo (1971, 2007) recruited a group of well-educated, middle-class young men.

Billy Crudup stars as Dr. Philip Zimbardo in *The Stanford Prison Experiment*, a dramatization of the 1970s study described in this section. Among other findings, the experiment showed how occupational roles can influence perception and behavior. ***How do your social roles shape your perceptions of others?***

He randomly chose 11 to serve as "guards" in a mock prison set up in the basement of Stanford's psychology building. He issued the guards uniforms, handcuffs, whistles, and billy clubs. The remaining 10 participants became "prisoners" and were placed in rooms with metal bars, bucket toilets, and cots.

Zimbardo let the guards establish their own rules for the experiment: no talking during meals and rest periods and after lights out. They took head counts at 2:30 a.m. Troublemakers received short rations. Faced with these conditions, the prisoners began to resist. Some barricaded their doors with beds. Others went on hunger strikes. Several ripped off their identifying number tags. The guards reacted to the rebellion by clamping down hard on protesters. Some turned sadistic, physically and verbally abusing the prisoners. The experiment was scheduled to go on for 2 weeks, but after 6 days Zimbardo realized that what had started as a simulation had become too intense. Clearly the roles they had taken on led the guards and prisoners to perceive, and then treat, each other very differently.

You can probably think of ways in which jobs you've held have affected how you view others. If you've been in customer service, you're probably more patient and understanding with those in similar positions (although you could also be a bit more critical). And if you've ever been promoted to manager at your place of work, you know that it typically changes your perceptions of, and behavior toward, coworkers who are now under your supervision.

Relational Roles

Think back to the "Who am I?" list you made in Chapter 3. It's likely your list included roles you play in relation to others: You may be a daughter, roommate, spouse, friend, and so on. Roles like these don't just define who you are—they also affect your perception.

Take for example the role of parent. As most new mothers and fathers will attest, having a child alters the way they see the world. They might perceive their crying baby as a helpless soul in need of comfort, whereas nearby strangers have a less charitable appraisal. As the child grows, parents often pay more attention to the messages in the child's environment. One father we know said he never noticed how much football fans curse and swear until he took his 6-year-old to a game with him. In other words, his role as father affected what he paid attention to and how he interpreted it.

The roles involved in romantic love can also dramatically affect perception. These roles have many labels: partner, spouse, boyfriend/girlfriend, and so on. There are times when your affinity biases the way you perceive the object of your affection. You may see your sweetheart as more attractive than other people do and as more attractive than your previous partners, regardless of whether that's objectively accurate (Swami & Allum, 2012). As a result, perhaps you overlook some faults that others notice (Segrin et al., 2009). Your romantic role can also

change the way you view others. Two separate studies (Cole et al., 2016; Gonzaga et al., 2008) found that when people are in love, they view other romantic candidates as less attractive than they otherwise would (one of the research teams referred to this as "perceptual downgrading").

Perhaps the most telltale sign of the effect of "love goggles" is when they come off. Many people have experienced breaking up with a romantic partner and wondering later, "What did I ever see in that person?" The answer—at least in part—is that you saw what your relational role led you to see.

CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Culture influences selection, organization, interpretation, and negotiation, and it exerts a powerful influence on the way we view others' communication. Even beliefs about the very value of talk differ from one culture to another (Dailey et al., 2005). Western cultures tend to view talk as desirable and use it for social purposes as well as to perform tasks. Silence has a negative value in these cultures. It is likely to be interpreted as lack of interest, unwillingness to communicate, hostility, anxiety, shyness, or a sign of interpersonal incompatibility. Westerners are generally uncomfortable with silence, which they often find embarrassing and awkward.

On the other hand, Asian cultures tend to perceive talk quite differently (Kim, 2002). Silence is valued, as Taoist sayings indicate: "In much talk there is great weariness," or "One who speaks does not know; one who knows does not speak." Unlike Westerners, Japanese and Chinese communicators believe that remaining quiet is the proper state when there is nothing to be said. To Asians, a talkative person is often considered a show-off or a fake.

These different views of speech and silence can lead to communication problems when people from different cultures meet. Communicators may view each other with disapproval and mistrust. Only when they recognize the cultural differences in behavior can they adapt, or at least understand and respect their differences.

The valuing of talk isn't the only way culture shapes perceptions. Cultural factors also affect our view of health professionals. Author Anne Fadiman (1997) explains why Hmong immigrants from the Southeast Asian country of Laos preferred their traditional shamanistic healers, called *txiv neeb*, to American doctors. The Hmong family whose experience she chronicled perceived striking differences in health care between the two cultures:

> A *txiv neeb* might spend as much as eight hours in a sick person's home; doctors forced their patients, no matter how weak they were, to come to the hospital, and then might spend only twenty minutes at their bedsides. *Txiv neebs* were polite and never needed to ask questions; doctors asked about their sexual and excretory habits. *Txiv neebs* could render an immediate diagnosis; doctors often demanded samples of blood (or even urine or feces, which they liked to keep in little bottles), took X rays, and waited for days for the results to come back from the laboratory—and then, after all that, sometimes they were unable to identify the cause of the problem. *Txiv neebs* never undressed their patients; doctors asked patients to take off all their clothes, and sometimes dared to put their fingers inside women's vaginas. *Txiv neebs* knew that to treat the body without treating the soul was an act of patent folly; doctors never even mentioned the soul. (p. 33)

Media Clip

Master of Perception: *Sherlock*

The famous Victorian sleuth Sherlock Holmes comes to life in the TV series *Sherlock*. Set in present-day London, the fictional detective (played by Benedict Cumberbatch) is successful in large measure because he's so perceptive. After watching people for only a few moments, he's able to draw stunningly accurate conclusions about their motives and behaviors. One of Sherlock's university classmates puts it this way: "He could look at you and tell your whole life story." In response, Sherlock states, "I simply observed."

In terms of perception principles, Sherlock is more careful at selecting stimuli than are those around him, noticing details that others missed. He also tries not to be influenced by expectations or by the obvious. In fact, Sherlock chides those who miss important information because they fall prey to the common perception tendencies described in these pages.

Although Holmes' powers of deduction make him a stellar investigator, he lacks interpersonal competence. He's often condescending and blunt, to the point of being rude. It appears that the man who is so perceptive about the world around him doesn't recognize—or perhaps care about—his own interpersonal blind spots.

Culture plays an important role in our ability to understand the perspectives of others (Amarasinghe, 2012; Croucher, 2013). People raised in individualist cultures, which value independence, are often less adept at perspective-taking than those from collectivist cultures, which value interdependence. In one study, Chinese and American players were paired together in a communication game that required the participants to take on the perspective of their partners (Wu & Keysar, 2007). In all measures, the collectivist Chinese had greater success in perspective-taking than did their American counterparts. This isn't to suggest that one cultural orientation is better than the other; it only shows that culture shapes the way we perceive, understand, and empathize with others.

Co-cultural factors affect perception as well. In studies using photos of children of various races, participants perceived black children as being significantly older than their actual ages (Goff et al., 2014). The same was not true of perceptions of white or Latino children. Participants also regarded black children as being more responsible for their actions than children of other races. The researchers maintain that this perception affects the treatment of black children in American culture. We'll have more to say about the negative effects of stereotyping later in this chapter.

COMMON TENDENCIES IN PERCEPTION

By now it's obvious that many factors affect the way we interpret the world. Social scientists use the term **attribution** to describe the process of attaching meaning to behavior (LaBelle & Martin, 2014; Rittenour & Kellas, 2015). We attribute meaning to both our own actions and the actions of others, but we often use different yardsticks. Research has uncovered several perceptual tendencies that may lead to inaccurate attributions.

WE MAKE SNAP JUDGMENTS

Our ancestors often had to make quick judgments about whether strangers were likely to be dangerous, and there are still times when this ability can be a survival skill (Enosh & Ben-Ari, 2013). But there are many cases when judging others without enough knowledge or information can get us into trouble. In the most serious cases, gun holders fire at innocent people after making inaccurate snap decisions. On a more personal level, most of us have felt badly misjudged by others who made unfavorable snap judgments. If you've ever been written off in the first few minutes of an interview, or unfairly rebuffed by someone you just met, then you know the feeling.

Despite the risks of rash decision making, in some circumstances people can make surprisingly good choices in the blink of an eye (Gladwell, 2004). The best snap judgments come from people whose decisions are based on expertise and experience. However, even nonexperts can be good at making some split-second decisions. For example, many speed daters are able to use physically observable traits to determine whether a person they have just met will become a romantic partner (Kurzban & Weeden, 2005). And researchers have found that inferences about politicians based on snap judgments of their looks alone can be surprisingly accurate (Wänke et al., 2013).

Snap judgments become particularly problematic when they are based on **stereotyping**—exaggerated beliefs associated with a categorizing system. Stereotypes, which people automatically make on "primitive categories" such as race, sex, and age (Devos, 2013), may be founded on a kernel of truth, but they go beyond the facts at hand and make claims that usually have no valid basis.

Three characteristics distinguish stereotypes from reasonable generalizations:

- The first involves *categorizing others on the basis of easily recognized but not necessarily significant characteristics*. For example, perhaps the first thing you notice about a person is his or her skin color—but that is not nearly as significant as the person's intelligence or achievements.
- The second feature that characterizes stereotypes is *ascribing a set of characteristics to most or all members of a group*. For example, you

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might unfairly assume that all older people are doddering or that all men are insensitive to women's concerns (Hummert, 2011).

- Finally, stereotyping involves *applying the generalization to a particular person*. Once you believe all old people are geezers or all men are jerks, it's a short step to considering a particular senior citizen as senile or a particular man as a sexist pig.

By adulthood, we tend to engage in stereotyping frequently, effortlessly, and often unconsciously, using what researchers call *implicit bias* to make our judgments (Morin, 2015). Once we create and hold these biases, we seek out isolated behaviors that support our inaccurate beliefs in an attempt to be cognitively consistent. For example, men and women in conflict with each other often notice or remember only behaviors of the opposite sex that fit their stereotypes (Allen, 1998). They then point to these behaviors—which might not be representative of how the other person typically behaves—to support their stereotypical and inaccurate claims: "Look! There you go criticizing me again. Typical for a woman!"

One way to avoid the kinds of communication problems that come from excessive stereotyping is to *decategorize*, or treat people as individuals. Changing labels can aid the process of decategorizing. Instead of talking about white coworkers, gay friends, or foreign students, dropping the descriptors "white," "gay," and "foreign" might help you and others perceive people more neutrally.

WE CLING TO FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Snap judgments are significant because our initial impressions of others often carry more weight than the ones that follow. This is due in part to what social scientists call the **primacy effect**: our tendency to pay more attention to, and to better recall, things that happen first in a sequence (Miller et al., 2004). You can probably recall first impressions you held of people who are now your close friends. With some it was "like at first sight." With others, your initial appraisal was negative and it took some time and effort for it to change. Either way, your first impressions played a significant role in the interactions that followed.

The term **halo effect** describes the tendency to form an overall positive impression of a person on the basis of one positive characteristic. Positive first impressions are often based on physical attractiveness, which can lead people to attribute all sorts of other virtues to a good-looking person (Lorenzo et al., 2010). For example, employment interviewers rate mediocre but attractive job applicants higher than their less attractive candidates (Watkins & Johnston, 2000). Unfortunately, the opposite also holds true. The **horns effect** (also called the "devil" or "pitchfork" effect) occurs when a negative appraisal adversely influences the perceptions that follow (Koenig & Jaswal, 2011).

Once we form a first impression—whether it's positive or negative—we are susceptible to **confirmation bias**: We tend to seek out and organize our impressions to support that opinion. For example, experimental

subjects asked more suspicious questions when they believed that a suspect had been cheating on a task (Hill et al., 2008). The same bias occurs in job interviews: Once a potential employer forms a positive impression, the tendency is to ask questions that confirm the employer's image of the applicant (Powell et al., 2012). The interviewer might ask leading questions aimed at supporting her positive views ("What valuable lessons did you learn from that setback?"), interpret answers in a positive light ("Ah, taking time away from school to travel was a good idea!"), encourage the applicant ("Good point!"), and sell the company's virtues ("I think you would like working here"). Likewise, applicants who create a negative first impression are operating under a cloud that may be impossible to dispel.

A study of college roommates shows all these effects at work. Roommates who had positive initial impressions of each other were likely to have positive subsequent interactions, manage their conflicts constructively, and continue living together (Marek et al., 2004). The opposite was also true: Roommates who got off to a bad start tended to spiral negatively. This finding reinforces the wisdom and importance of the old adage, "You never get a second chance to make a first impression."

WE JUDGE OURSELVES MORE CHARITABLY THAN WE DO OTHERS

Whereas we may evaluate others critically, we tend to judge ourselves more generously (McClure et al., 2011). Social scientists use two theories to explain this phenomenon. The first is called the **fundamental attribution error**: the tendency to give more weight to personal qualities than to the situation when making attributions (McPherson & Young, 2004). For instance, if someone you know makes a hurtful comment, you're likely to chalk it up to flaws in her or his character (mean spirited) than to external factors (fatigue, peer pressure). We're more charitable when judging ourselves. This **self-serving bias** means that when we perform poorly, we usually blame external forces—and when we perform well, we credit ourselves rather than the situation (Shepperd et al., 2008).

Consider a few examples of using different standards when making attributions of ourselves and others:

- When *they* botch a job, we think they weren't listening well; when *we* make the mistake, the problem was unclear directions.
- When *he* makes an overly critical comment, it's because he's insensitive; when *we* do, it's constructive criticism.
- When *she* uses profanity, it's because of a flaw in her character; when *we* swear, it's because the situation called for it (see Young, 2004).

One study of "honest but hurtful" messages shows how self-serving bias can operate in romantic relationships (Zhang, 2009). Partners who deliver these messages tend to see them as helpful and constructive. When on the receiving end, however, communicators see the same messages as

FOCUS ON RESEARCH

Hurtful Communication: A Matter of Perception

"You always hurt the one you love"—or so the song lyric says. A team of communication scholars led by Stacy Young explored the truth behind this claim.

The researchers asked couples to discuss a relational conflict for seven minutes. Afterward, each partner viewed a recording of the conversation and counted the number of times something hurtful was said.

The couples often disagreed on which comments were hurtful. In fact, they agreed only 20 percent of the time. But one thing was consistent: Participants regularly attributed more hurtful comments to their partners than to themselves.

It's noteworthy that the couples in the study actually scored high in measures of relational satisfaction. This finding shows that even in a happy romantic relationship, self-serving bias affects perceptions of hurtful communication.

Young, S. L., Bippus, A. M., & Dunbar, N. E. (2015). Comparing romantic partners' perceptions of hurtful communication during conflict conversations. *Southern Communication Journal, 80,* 39–54.

hurtful and mean. It's even easier to engage in self-serving bias in impersonal online relationships. A study showed that members of online teams, as opposed to in-person teams, were quicker to blame their partners when mistakes occurred (Walther & Bazarova, 2007). The researchers suggest that "unseen, unknown, and remote" teammates are easy scapegoats when something goes wrong.

When you're feeling wronged, it's easy to blame others, believing they're out to get you. But it's possible you've misperceived their intentions, and talking things out might help. In one study, experimental subjects were surprised to discover that partners who had assigned them tedious tasks meant no harm. In fact, those partners were ready to apologize once they were informed of the perceived slight (Adams & Insei, 2016). The same principle can operate in the real world. You might feel bullied by a boss who overloads you with work, but it could be she isn't aware of how you feel. She might even change your workload once you speak up—respectfully, of course. The goal is to make sure the two of you hold similar perceptions of the matter, or at least understand one another's point of view. For ideas about how to talk about delicate issues such as this, see the discussions of perception checking in this chapter and of "I" language in Chapter 5.

WE ARE INFLUENCED BY OUR EXPECTATIONS

Suppose you took a class and were told in advance that the instructor was terrific. Would this expectation affect the way you perceived the teacher? Research shows that it almost certainly would. In one study, students who read positive comments about instructors on a website viewed those teachers as

more credible and attractive than did students who were not exposed to the same comments (Edwards et al., 2007; see also Edwards & Edwards, 2013).

Expectations don't always lead to more positive appraisals. There are times when we raise our expectations so high that we are set up for disappointment. If you are told that someone you are about to meet is extremely attractive, you may be let down when the person doesn't live up to your unrealistic mental image. Our expectations influence the way we see others, both positively and negatively—and may lead to self-fulfilling prophecies (DiPaola et al., 2010).

This is an important point to remember when making decisions about others. Many professions require that manuscripts submitted to journals be evaluated through "blind review"—that is, without identifying information that might influence the evaluator's appraisal. Orchestras often use "blind auditions," where musicians perform behind a screen (Rice, 2013). In the same way, you can probably think of situations when it would be wise to avoid seeking advance information about another person you meet.

Judges on the TV show *The Voice* keep their backs to contestants at first to evaluate singing on its own merit. ***How have you been swayed by appearances? How can you avoid this common perceptual tendency?***

WE ARE INFLUENCED BY THE OBVIOUS

Being influenced by what is most obvious is understandable. As you read earlier, we select stimuli from our environment that are noticeable—that is, intense, repetitious, unusual, or otherwise attention grabbing. The problem is that the most obvious factor is not necessarily the only cause—or the most significant one—of an event. For example:

- When two children (or adults, for that matter) fight, it may be a mistake to blame the one who lashes out loudest. Perhaps the other one was at least equally responsible, teasing or refusing to cooperate.
- You might complain about an acquaintance whose malicious gossiping or arguing has become a bother, forgetting that by putting up with that kind of behavior you have been at least partially responsible.
- You might blame an unhappy work situation on the boss, overlooking other factors beyond her control, such as a change in the economy, the policy of higher management, or demands of customers or other workers.

These examples show that it is important to take time to gather all the facts before arriving at a conclusion.

WE ASSUME OTHERS ARE LIKE US

We commonly imagine that others possess the same attitudes and motives that we do (Human & Biesanz, 2011). The frequently mistaken assumption

that others' views are similar to our own applies in a wide range of situations. For example:

- You've heard a slightly raunchy joke that you found funny. You assume that it won't offend a friend. It does.
- You've been bothered by an instructor's tendency to get off the subject during lectures. If you were a professor, you'd want to hear constructive criticism, so you decide to share it, expecting the professor to be grateful. Unfortunately, you're wrong.
- You lost your temper with a friend a week ago and said some things you regret. In fact, if someone said those things to you, you would consider the relationship finished. Imagining that your friend feels the same way, you avoid making contact. In fact, your friend feels that he was partly responsible and has avoided you because he thinks you're the one who wants to end things.

These examples show that others don't always think or feel the way we do and that assuming similarities can lead to problems. Sometimes you can find out the other person's real position by asking directly, sometimes by checking with others, and sometimes by making an educated guess after you've thought the matter out. All these alternatives are better than simply assuming everyone would react the way you do.

We don't always fall into the kind of perceptual tendencies described in this section. Sometimes, for instance, people *are* responsible for their misfortunes, or our problems *are not* our fault. Likewise, the most obvious interpretation of a situation may be the correct one. Nonetheless, a large amount of research has shown again and again that our perceptions of others are often distorted in the ways we have described. The moral, then, is clear: Don't assume your perceptions are accurate or unbiased.

SYNCHRONIZING OUR PERCEPTIONS

After reading this far, you can appreciate how out of sync our perceptions of one another can be. These mismatched perceptions can interfere with our communication—and they can increase exponentially. As one communication scholar wryly puts it, confusion emerges "whenever we try to imagine what others think we think they think" (Anton, 2015). What we need, then, are tools to help others understand our perceptions and for us, in turn, to understand theirs. In this section, we introduce two such tools.

PERCEPTION CHECKING

Given the likelihood for perceptual errors, it's easy to see how a communicator can leap to the wrong conclusion and make inaccurate assumptions. Consider the defense-arousing potential of incorrect accusations such as these:

"Why are you mad at me?" (Who said I was?)
"What's the matter with you?" (Who said anything was the matter?)
"Come on now. Tell the truth." (Who said I was lying?)

Even if your interpretations are correct, these kinds of mind-reading statements are likely to generate defensiveness. The skill of **perception checking** provides a better way to review your assumptions and to share your interpretations (Hansen et al., 2002). A complete perception check has three parts:

1. A description of the behavior you noticed.
2. Two possible interpretations of the behavior.
3. A request for clarification about how to interpret the behavior.

Perception checks for the preceding three examples would look like this:

"When you stomped out of the room and slammed the door [behavior], I wasn't sure whether you were mad at me [first interpretation] or just in a hurry [second interpretation]. How did you feel? [request for clarification]"
"You haven't laughed much in the last couple of days [behavior]. It makes me wonder whether something's bothering you [first interpretation] or whether you're just being quiet [second interpretation]. What's up? [request for clarification]"
"You said you really liked the job I did [behavior], but there was something about your voice that made me think you may not like it [first interpretation]. Maybe it's just my imagination, though [second interpretation]. How do you really feel? [request for clarification]"

Perception checking is a tool to help us understand others accurately instead of assuming that our first interpretation is correct. Because its goal is mutual understanding, perception checking is a cooperative approach to communication. Besides leading to more accurate perceptions, it signals an attitude of respect and concern for the other person, saying, in effect, "I know I'm not qualified to judge you without some help."

Sometimes an effective perception check won't need all of the parts listed in the preceding example to be effective:

"You haven't dropped by lately. Is anything the matter? [single interpretation]"
"I can't tell whether you're kidding me about being cheap or if you're serious [behavior combined with interpretations]. Are you mad at me?" [request for interpretation]
"Are you sure you don't mind driving? I can use a ride if it's no trouble, but I don't want to take you out of your way [request for clarification comes first; no need to describe behavior]."

The straightforward approach of perception checking has the best chance of working in what we identified in Chapter 2 as *low-context cultures*, ones in which members value candor and self-disclosure. American,

DARK SIDE OF COMMUNICATION

Distorting Perception: The Gaslight Effect

The gaslight effect (or "gaslighting") is a contemporary term for manipulating and controlling another person's perceptions. The term refers to the 1944 film classic *Gaslight*, in which a husband tries to convince his wife that she's insane by changing small elements in their environment—and then insisting she's wrong when she points out these changes.

Therapist Robin Stern has written extensively about the gaslight effect, identifying it as a form of mental abuse (2007; see also Sarkis, 2017). A less pathological form of gaslighting occurs when one person deceitfully tries to justify his or her behavior by blaming the other. "You never told me that," an accuser might say while knowing that the statement isn't true. Or more maliciously, "You expect me to be faithful when you're always coming on to other guys?" Shifting guilt to the innocent is a hallmark of gaslighting.

Victims of gaslighting tend to blame themselves, apologize, and offer excuses for another's behaviors. Depression and withdrawal often follow. It's hard to communicate freely when you've been led to believe you're always wrong.

Recognizing the symptoms of gaslighting is the first step in breaking the pattern. Another key is seeking out objective perspectives from trusted others. The perception-checking skills described in this section are useful tools in a healthy relationship. However, if you think you're being manipulated by a significant other, perception checking with people outside the relationship can help ensure that your perspective hasn't been distorted.

Australian, Canadian, and German dominant cultures, for example, fit into this category. Members of these groups are most likely to appreciate the kind of straight talking that perception checking embodies. On the other hand, members of *high-context cultures* (more common in Latin America and Asia) value social harmony over clarity. High-context communicators are more likely to regard candid approaches such as perception checking as potentially embarrassing, preferring instead less direct ways of understanding one another.

Along with clarifying meaning, perception checking can sometimes be a face-saving way to raise an issue without directly threatening or attacking the other person. Consider these examples:

"Were you going to drop off the rent check tomorrow?"

"Am I boring you, or do you have something else on your mind?"

In the first case, you might have been quite sure your roommate had forgotten to deliver the rent check, and in the second that the other person was bored. Even so, a perception check is a less threatening way of pointing out their behavior than direct confrontation. Remember that one element of competent communication is the ability to choose the best option from a large repertoire, and perception checking can be a useful strategy at times.

BUILDING EMPATHY

Perception checking can help us decode messages more accurately, but it doesn't provide enough information for us to claim that we fully understand another person. For example, a professor who uses perception checking might learn that a student's reluctance to ask questions is due to confusion and not lack of interest. This information would be helpful, but imagine how much more effective the professor would be if she or he could get a sense of the confusion from the student's perspective. Likewise, parents who use perception checking might find that their teenager's outlandish behavior grows from a desire to be accepted. But to truly understand this behavior, the parents

would need to consider (or perhaps recall) what it feels like to crave that acceptance.

"How would you feel if the mouse did that to you?"

Empathy Defined

What we need, then, to understand others more completely is **empathy**—the ability to recreate another person's perspective, to experience the world from his or her point of view (Geist, 2013). It is impossible to achieve total empathy, but with enough effort and skill, we can come closer to this goal (Krause, 2010).

Empathy has three dimensions. On one level, empathy involves *perspective taking*—the ability to take on the viewpoint of another person (Manohar & Appiah, 2016). This understanding requires a suspension of judgment so that for the moment you set aside your own opinions and take on those of the other person. Besides cognitive understanding, empathy also has an affective dimension—what social scientists term *emotional contagion*. In everyday language, emotional contagion means that we experience the same feelings that others have. We know their fear, joy, sadness, and so on. A third ingredient of empathy is a genuine *concern* for the welfare of the other person. Not only do we think and feel as others do, but we have a sincere interest in their well-being. Full empathy requires both intellectual understanding of the other person's position and an affective understanding of the other's feelings (Carré et al., 2013; Kerem et al., 2001).

It's easy to confuse empathy with *sympathy*, but the concepts are different. With sympathy, you view the other person's situation from your point of view. With empathy, you view it from the other person's perspective. Consider the difference between sympathizing and empathizing with a single parent or a homeless person. When you sympathize, your feelings focus on the other person's confusion, joy, or pain. When you empathize, the experience becomes your own, at least for the moment. It's one thing to feel bad (or good) *for* someone; it's more profound to feel bad (or good) *with* someone.

Experiencing Empathy

Empathy may be valuable, but it isn't always easy to achieve (Ickes & Hodges, 2013). In fact, it's hardest to empathize with people who are radically different from us in categories such as age, sex, and socioeconomic status (Goleman, 2013). To make such perceptual leaps, you need to develop open-mindedness, imagination, and commitment. The good news is that researchers are learning that empathy is less an inborn trait, like height, than a learnable skill, like playing chess. This is especially true

Media Clip

Gaining Empathy: *Undercover Boss*

The long-running reality series *Undercover Boss* depicts how walking in another's shoes can increase interpersonal empathy. In the show, high-ranking company officials don disguises and take on the roles of entry-level employees in their organizations. Some of the bosses rediscover what it was like when they were working their way up the occupational ladder. Others gain new appreciation for a world they've never known.

Versions of the show run in 15 different countries, suggesting there's international appeal in watching a boss spend time in the organizational trenches. Researchers interviewed 13 CEOs who had been on the series to see what they learned from the experience (Cumberland & Alagaraja, 2016). The executives uniformly agreed they gained new empathy for workers in their company, and they also gleaned a better understanding of their organization's culture. Better yet, most said they made changes in company policies as a result of being on the program.

Although you may never become a CEO or be on a reality show, the empathy lesson of *Undercover Boss* should be clear: When communicating interpersonally, it's important to understand what the world looks like from the other person's vantage point.

when there's a will to empathize, and a belief that doing so is possible (Schumann, et al., 2014).

The best way to gain empathy for people whose point of view differs from yours is by interacting with them (Zhang, 2016). We can also empathize by attempting to experience the world from another's perspective. Rachel Kolb (2016) describes such a moment. As a deaf person born to a hearing family, she is fluent in both American Sign Language (ASL) and spoken English (which she understands by lip reading). Kolb was having lunch with a hearing friend, who agreed to converse in ASL instead of spoken English. That conversation was an eye-opener.

> . . . after a few minutes, my usually bold, un-self-conscious friend stopped. She chuckled and shrugged a little, and said, "I feel like everyone here is *looking at us.*"
>
> I glanced around the small cafe, at all the hearing people sitting at their tables. Indeed, some had craned their necks to look at our movements, but this was behavior I'd long ago ceased to notice. "Yeah," I signed back, bluntly. "That often happens."
>
> My friend smiled. A moment later, we started conversing again, and I think then she understood: *This* is what it can be like to occupy a signing body.

Simulations can also help you experience another person's reality. For instance, spending even a short time in a virtual body of someone whose race differs from yours can help you understand how the world looks and feels to them (Hogenboom, 2013). Literally—or, at least, virtually—inhabiting the body of another provides the basis for developing empathy, which can lead to a reduction in bias. Similarly, college students who took on avatars of elderly people and entered their virtual environment came away with new attitudes toward the aged (Yee & Bailenson, 2006).

Empathy and Ethics

The "golden rule" of treating others as we want to be treated points to the clear relationship between empathy and the ethical principles that enable society to function (Howe, 2013).

ASSESSING YOUR COMMUNICATION

Your Empathy Quotient

Respond to each of the following statements using a scale ranging from 0 to 4, where 0 = "never" and 4 = "always." Also have someone who knows you well fill out the instrument about you and compare notes afterward.

_____ **1.** When someone else is feeling excited, I tend to get excited too.

_____ **2.** Other people's misfortunes do not disturb me a great deal.

_____ **3.** It upsets me to see someone being treated disrespectfully.

_____ **4.** I remain unaffected when someone close to me is happy.

_____ **5.** I enjoy making other people feel better.

_____ **6.** I have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than I am.

_____ **7.** When a friend starts to talk about his/her problems, I try to steer the conversation toward something else.

_____ **8.** I can tell when others are sad even when they do not say anything.

_____ **9.** I find that I am "in tune" with other people's moods.

_____ **10.** I do not feel sympathy for people who cause their own serious illnesses.

_____ **11.** I become irritated when someone cries.

_____ **12.** I am not really interested in how other people feel.

_____ **13.** I get a strong urge to help when I see someone who is upset.

_____ **14.** When I see someone being treated unfairly, I do not feel very much pity for them.

_____ **15.** I find it silly for people to cry out of happiness.

_____ **16.** When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel a bit protective toward him/her.

Adapted from Spreng, R., McKinnon, M. C., Mar, R. A., & Levine, B. (2009). The Toronto Empathy Questionnaire: Scale development and initial validation of a factor-analytic solution to multiple empathy measures. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, *91*, 62–71.

For scoring information, see page 132 at the end of the chapter.

A look at criminal behavior demonstrates the link between empathy, ethics, and communication. Typically, people who have committed the most offensive crimes against others, such as rape and child abuse, do not express any sense of how their actions affected the victims (Clements et al., 2007). New treatments attempt to change behavior by instilling the ability to imagine how others are feeling (Day et al., 2010). In these programs, offenders read and watch emotional accounts of crimes similar to the ones they have committed. Offenders also write accounts of what their crimes must have felt like to the victim, read these stories to others in therapy groups, and even experience simulated reenactments in which they play the role of the victim. Through strategies such as these, therapists try to help offenders develop the empathy required to have an ethical approach to the world.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Objective 4.1 Understand the subjective nature of perceiving interpersonal messages and relationships.

The reality we perceive is constructed through communication with others. First-order realities involve things and events that are objectively observable; second-order realities are the meanings we assign to those things and events. Interpersonal perception involves four phases: selection, organization, interpretation, and negotiation.

Q: Recall an important exchange in which you viewed matters differently than your relational partner. Describe how you selected, organized, and interpreted the other person's behavior and how your partner perceived the exchange differently. How successful were you in negotiating a shared perception of what happened?

Objective 4.2 Identify the variety of influences on interpersonal perception.

Physiological influences on perception include our senses, age, health and fatigue, biological cycles, hunger, and neurobehavioral challenges. Psychological influences such as mood and self-concept also have a strong influence on how we regard others. In addition, social influences such as sex and gender roles, occupational roles, and relational roles play an important part in the way we view those with whom we interact. Finally, cultural influences shape how we recognize and make sense of others' words and actions.

Q: Identify instances in which the physiological, psychological, social, and cultural influences described in this chapter shaped your perceptions and consequently your interpersonal communication.

Objective 4.3 Recognize how common tendencies in perception shape interpersonal communication.

We tend to make snap judgments and cling to first impressions, even if they are mistaken. We are more likely to blame others than ourselves for misfortunes. We are influenced by our expectations. We also are influenced by obvious stimuli, even if they are not the most important factors. Finally, we assume others are similar to us.

Q: Describe a case in which the perceptual tendencies described in this chapter shaped your perceptions and consequently your communication. How might the incident have turned out differently if you had not succumbed to these perceptual errors?

Objective 4.4 Use perception checking and adjust attitudes to enhance empathy with communication partners.

One way to coordinate our interpretations with others is through perception checking. Instead of jumping to conclusions, communicators who check their perceptions describe the behavior they noticed, offer two equally plausible interpretations, and ask for clarification from their partner.

Empathy is the ability to experience the world from another person's perspective. There are three dimensions to empathy: perspective taking, emotional involvement, and concern for the other person. Requirements for empathy include open-mindedness, imagination, and commitment.

Q: Construct a perception-checking statement you could use to clarify your understanding in an important relationship. How might using this approach affect the relationship if you presented it using the empathy-enhancing attitudes described in this chapter?

KEY TERMS

Androgynous (114)
Attribution (118)
Confirmation bias (120)
Empathy (127)
First-order realities (105)
Fundamental attribution error (121)
Gender (113)
Halo effect (120)
Horns effect (120)
Interpretation (107)
Narrative (109)
Negotiation (108)
Organization (106)
Perception checking (125)
Primacy effect (120)
Punctuation (107)
Second-order realities (105)
Selection (106)
Self-serving bias (121)
Standpoint theory (113)
Stereotyping (119)

ACTIVITIES

1. Complete the following sentences:

a. Women . . . _____

b. Men . . . _____

c. Latinos . . . _____

d. European Americans . . . _____

e. African Americans . . . _____

f. Older people . . . _____

Now share your observations with a classmate and discuss the degree to which each of your responses was a stereotype and/or a generalization. How could your answers to these questions change the way you perceive and respond to people in these groups? Discuss with your classmate ways in which your communication is affected by stereotyping.

2. You can get a better appreciation of the importance of punctuation by using the format pictured in Figure 4.3 (p. 107) to diagram the following situations:

a. A father and daughter are growing more and more distant. The daughter withdraws because she interprets her father's coolness as rejection. The father views his daughter's aloofness as a rebuff and withdraws further.

b. The relationship between two friends is becoming strained. One jokes to lighten up the tension, and the other becomes more tense.

c. A couple is on the verge of breaking up. One partner frequently asks the other to show more affection. The other withdraws physical contact.

Explain how each of these situations could be punctuated differently by each participant. Next, use the same procedure to identify how an event from your experience could be punctuated in at least two different ways. Describe the consequences of failing to recognize the plausibility of each of these punctuation schemes.

3. In a group, have each member choose one of the following situations, and describe how it could be perceived differently by each person. Be sure to include the steps of selection, organization, and interpretation. What might their narratives sound like as they negotiate their perceptions? List any relevant physiological, psychological, social, and cultural influences, as well as suggesting how the communicators' self-concepts might have affected their perceptions.

a. A customer complains to a salesperson about poor service in a busy store.

b. A parent and teenager argue about the proper time for returning home after a Saturday night date.

c. A quiet student feels pressured when called on by an instructor to speak up in class.

d. A woman and a man argue about whether to increase balance in the workplace by making special efforts to hire employees from underrepresented groups.

4. Improve your perception-checking ability by developing complete perception-checking statements for each of the following situations. Be sure your statements include a description of the behavior, two plausible interpretations, and a request for verification.

a. You made what you thought was an excellent suggestion to your boss. He or she said, "I'll get back to you about that right away." It's been 3 weeks, and you haven't received a response yet.

b. You haven't received the usual weekly phone call from your family in over a month. Last time you spoke, you had an argument about where to spend the holidays.

After you've created your perception-checking statements, share them with some friends or family members and see how they would respond if they were the recipients.

5. You can develop your empathy skills by putting yourself in the shoes of someone with whom you have an interpersonal relationship. With that person's help, describe *in the first person* how the other person views an issue that is important to him or her. In other words, try as much as possible to become that person and see things from his or her perspective. Your partner will be the best judge of your ability to make this perceptual jump, so use his or her feedback to modify your account. After completing the exercise, describe how your attempt changed the way you might relate to the other person.

SCORING FOR ASSESSING YOUR COMMUNICATION (PAGE 129)

Before summing your responses to the 16 items, reverse the scores for the negatively worded items: 2, 4, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, and 15. That is, for these items, 0 = 4, 1 = 3, 2 = 2, 3 = 1, and 4 = 0. After reversing the scores for

the noted items, sum all your responses to determine your total empathy score. In several studies, female participants scored slightly higher than male ones. For women, on average, the sum was 47; for men, the sum was 44.

The 16 items capture the most commonly measured aspect of empathy, "an emotional process or an accurate affective insight into the feeling state of another" (Spreng et al., 2009, p. 62).

5

Language

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

5.1 Explain the symbolic, rule-based, subjective, culture-bound nature of language.

5.2 Recognize the impact, both positive and negative, of language in interpersonal relationships.

5.3 Describe the influence gender has on language use in interpersonal relationships.

5.4 Identify ways in which online language usage is different from the in-person variety.

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PROFESSOR LERA BORODITSKY (2009) often begins her undergraduate lectures by asking students which cognitive faculty they would least want to lose. Most choose vision; a few pick hearing. Almost no one mentions language.

Boroditsky suggests this is an oversight. After all, she reasons, people who lack the ability to see or hear can still have rich and satisfying lives. "But what would your life be like if you had never learned a language?" she wonders. "Could you still have friends, get an education, hold a job, start a family? Language is so fundamental to our experience, so deeply a part of being human, that it's hard to imagine life without it" (p. 116).

A simple exercise illustrates how language is basic to our view of the world. Take a look at Figure 5.1 and quickly name aloud each of the *colors* of the words (for instance, you should say "orange, blue, yellow" when reading the first line). Chances are, you'll have difficulty doing so without pausing or stumbling. This phenomenon, known as the Stroop effect, points to how language influences perception. We see the world through the filter of our words.

Language is arguably the most essential component of human communication. In this chapter, we explore the relationship between words and ideas. We describe some important characteristics of language and show how these characteristics affect our day-to-day communication. We outline several types of troublesome language and show how to replace them with more effective kinds of speech. Finally, we look at how gender and online communication influence the way we use language.

THE NATURE OF LANGUAGE

We begin our survey by looking at some features that characterize all languages. These features explain both why language is such a useful tool and why it can be so troublesome.

FIGURE 5.1 The Stroop Effect. Naming the color of a printed word is more difficult if the word meaning and the color do not match.

LANGUAGE IS SYMBOLIC

Words are arbitrary symbols that have no meaning in themselves. For example, the word *five* is a kind of code that represents the number of fingers on your hand only because we agree that it does. As Bateson and Jackson (1964) point out, "There is nothing particularly five-like in the number 'five'" (p. 271). To a speaker of French, the symbol *cinq* would convey the same meaning; to a computer, the same value would be represented by the digitally coded symbol *0101*.

Even sign language, as "spoken" by most deaf people, is symbolic in nature (Sandler, 2013). Because this form of communication is symbolic and not literal, there are hundreds of different sign languages used around the world that have evolved independently, whenever significant numbers

of deaf people have come in contact (Meir et al., 2010). These distinct languages include American Sign Language, Mexican Sign Language, British Sign Language, French Sign Language, Danish Sign Language, Chinese Sign Language, and Australian Aboriginal and Mayan Sign Languages—and communicating across different sign languages can be as difficult as it is across different spoken languages (Quinto-Pozos, 2008).

LANGUAGE IS RULE-GOVERNED

The only reason symbol-laden languages work at all is that people agree on how to use them. The linguistic agreements that make communication possible can be codified in rules. Languages contain several types of rules that continuously evolve (Garner, 2014). **Phonological rules** govern how sounds are combined to form words. For instance, the words *champagne*, *double*, and *occasion* have the same meanings in French as in English, but their pronunciations differ across the two languages because of differing phonological rules.

Whereas phonological rules determine how spoken language sounds, **syntactic rules** govern the way symbols can be arranged. Notice that the following statements contain the same words, but the shift in syntax creates quite different meanings:

Whiskey makes you sick when you're well.
Whiskey, when you're sick, makes you well.

Although most of us aren't able to describe the syntactic rules that govern our language, it's easy to recognize their existence when they are violated. A humorous example is the way the character Yoda speaks in the *Star Wars* movies. Phrases such as "the dark side are they" or "your father he is" often elicit a chuckle because they bend syntactical norms. Sometimes, however, apparently ungrammatical speech is simply following a different set of syntactic rules, reflecting regional or co-cultural dialects. Linguists believe it is crucial to view such dialects as *different* rather than *deficient* forms of English (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2005).

Media Clip

Invented Languages: *Game of Thrones*

When characters on the series *Game of Thrones* speak foreign-sounding words, they're not just spouting gibberish. The show commissioned linguist David J. Peterson to create actual languages for these scenes, including Dothraki and Valyrian. These languages follow the same rules—phonological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic—described in this section.

Peterson takes his job seriously. When he created the language Dothraki (which is spoken by a nomadic warrior tribe in the series), he mapped out the history of every word—including thousands of words that would never be needed on the show (Brennan, 2016). Peterson also developed complete languages for characters in shows such as *The 100* and *The Shannara Chronicles*.

If the idea of inventing a language seems odd, consider that you may have done so on a much smaller scale. If you have terms and phrases that you use with friends and loved ones that outsiders wouldn't understand, then you too have engaged in a form of language creation.

Semantic rules govern the meaning of language as opposed to its structure. These make it possible for us to agree that "bikes" are for riding and "books" are for reading. Without semantic rules, communication would be impossible; each of us would use symbols in unique ways, unintelligible to others.

Semantic rules help us understand the meaning of individual words, but they often don't explain how language operates in everyday life. Consider the statement "Let's get together tomorrow." The semantic meaning of the words in this sentence is clear enough, yet the statement could be taken in several ways. It could be a straightforward invitation ("I hope we can get together"), a polite command ("I want to see you"), or an empty cliché ("I don't really want to see you"). We learn to distinguish the accurate meanings of such speech acts through **pragmatic rules**, which tell us what uses and interpretations of a message are appropriate in a given context (Dougherty et al., 2009).

When all players understand and use the same pragmatic rules, smooth communication is possible. For example, one rule specifies that the relationship between communicators affects the meaning of a statement. The statement "I want to see you" is likely to mean one thing when uttered by your boss and another entirely when it comes from your lover. Likewise, the setting in which the statement is made plays a role: "I want to see you" will probably have a different meaning at the office than at a party. Of course, the nonverbal behaviors that accompany a statement also help us decode its meaning.

People in individual relationships create their own sets of pragmatic rules. Consider the use of humor: The teasing and jokes you exchange with gusto with one friend might be considered tasteless or offensive in another relationship. For instance, imagine an email message typed in CAPITAL LETTERS and filled with CURSE WORDS, INSULTS, NAME-CALLING, and EXCLAMATION MARKS!!! How would you interpret such a message? An outside observer might consider this an example of "flaming" and be appalled, when in fact the message might be a fun-loving case of "verbal jousting" between buddies (O'Sullivan & Flanagin, 2003; Maiz-Arevalo, 2015). If you have a good friend whom you call by a less-than-tasteful nickname as a term of endearment, then you understand the concept. Keep in mind, however, that those who aren't privy

to your relationship's pragmatic rules are likely to misunderstand you, so you'll want to be wise about when and where to use these personal codes.

LANGUAGE IS SUBJECTIVE

If the rules of language were more precise and if everyone followed them, we would suffer from fewer misunderstandings. You have an hour-long argument about "feminism" only to discover that you each were using the term in different ways and that you really were in basic agreement. You tease a friend in what you mean to be a playful manner, but he takes you seriously and is offended.

These problems occur because people attach different meanings to the same message. Ogden and Richards (1923) illustrated this point in their well-known "triangle of meaning" (see Figure 5.2). This model shows that there is only an indirect relationship—indicated by a broken line—between a word and the thing or idea it represents.

FIGURE 5.2 Ogden and Richards' Triangle of Meaning

Ogden and Richards's model is oversimplified in that not all words refer to physical things, or "referents." For instance, some referents are abstract ideas (such as *love*), whereas others (such as *angry* or *exciting*) aren't even nouns. Despite these shortcomings, the triangle of meaning is useful because it clearly demonstrates an important principle: *Meanings are in people, not words*. Hence, an important task facing communicators is to establish a common understanding of the words they use to exchange messages. In this sense, communication—at least the effective kind—requires us to negotiate the meaning of our language (Leung & Lewkowicz, 2013). This brings us back to a familiar theme: Meaning is both *in* and *among* people. Language is a function of individuals who give each word unique meaning as well as cultures that create and share meaning collectively.

LANGUAGE AND WORLDVIEW

For more than 150 years, theorists have put forth the notion of **linguistic relativity**—that a language both reflects and shapes the worldview of those who use it (Deutscher, 2010; Everett, 2013). For instance, bilingual speakers seem to think differently when they change languages (Cook & Bassetti, 2011). In one study, French Americans were asked to interpret a series of pictures. When they spoke in French, their descriptions were far more romantic and emotional than when they used English to describe the same kind of images. In Israel, both Muslim and Jewish students saw bigger distinctions between their group and "outsiders" when using their native language than when they spoke in English, a neutral tongue in this context. Examples such as these show the power of language to shape cultural identity—sometimes for better and sometimes for worse.

The best-known declaration of linguistic relativity is the **Sapir–Whorf hypothesis**, credited to Benjamin Whorf, an amateur linguist, and

The sci-fi film *Arrival* offers a dramatized illustration of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. By learning the language of extraterrestrial visitors, linguistics professor Louise Banks (Amy Adams) experiences the world in profoundly different ways. ***Are you fluent in more than one language? If so, how does each one shape your worldview?***

anthropologist Edward Sapir (Tohidian, 2009; Whorf, 1956). Following Sapir's theoretical work, Whorf found that the language spoken by Hopi Native Americans represented a view of reality that is dramatically different from how speakers of other languages view the world. For example, the Hopi language makes no distinction between nouns and verbs. Therefore, the people who speak it describe the entire world as being constantly in process. Whereas English speakers use nouns to characterize people or objects as being fixed or constant, the Hopi language represents them more as verbs, constantly changing. In this sense, English represents the world rather like a collection of snapshots, whereas the Hopi representation is more like a movie.

Some languages contain terms that have no English equivalents (Wire, 2010). For example, consider a few words in other languages that have no simple translation in English:

- *Nemawashi* (Japanese): the process of informally feeling out the opinions of all the people involved with an issue before making a decision
- *Lagniappe* (French/Creole): an extra gift given in a transaction that wasn't expected by the terms of a contract
- *Lao* (Mandarin): respectful term used for older people, showing their importance in the family and in society
- *Dharma* (Sanskrit): each person's unique, ideal path in life and the knowledge of how to find it

It's possible to imagine concepts like these without having specific words to describe them, but linguistic relativity suggests that the terms do shape the thinking and actions of people who use them. Thus, speakers of a language that includes the notion of *lao* would probably be more inclined to treat their older members respectfully, and those who are familiar with *lagniappe* might be more generous.

The potential impact of linguistic relativity on interpersonal communication is significant. Consider the difference between the phrases "You make me angry" and "I get angry when you. . . ." The first phrase says to the other person—and to yourself—that your anger is the other person's fault. The second phrase is an "I" message that takes responsibility for your emotions (a concept described later in this chapter and also in Chapter 8). Changing your language can not only help reduce defensiveness in the other person, but it can also reframe how *you* see the situation. The same could happen if you begin calling adult females "women" instead of "girls" (Florio, 2016), or if you refer to college undergrads as "students" instead of "kids" (Valles, 2014). You might view those people differently based on the labels you use to describe them. Your words can affect how you see the world.

FOCUS ON RESEARCH

The Negative Consequences of Fat Talk

A premise of linguistic relativity is that our words don't just *reflect* how we see the world; they also *affect* how we see it. The language we use shapes our perception of things, others, and ourselves.

Communication researcher Analisa Arroyo found this principle at work in her study of "fat talk." People who regularly put concerns about their weight into words ("I'm so fat"; "My butt is huge") reinforce a poor body image. Arroyo identified three particular signs that fat talk is doing harm: (1) when it's used routinely and compulsively; (2) when it involves constant comparisons with others; and (3) when it includes guilt words such as "should" and "ought" ("I really should drop some weight"). As discussed in Chapter 3, a steady diet of negative self-appraisals and social comparison can turn into a destructive cycle of thoughts, words, and behaviors.

In an interesting twist, there seems to be no harm in *listening* to fat talk. Says Arroyo, "It is the act of engaging in fat talk, rather than passively being exposed to it, that has these negative effects." She suggests that people struggling with this problem should establish "fat talk free" weeks with their friends. Arroyo also believes that replacing "I should" with "I will" or "I can" when talking about weight reduction can help people move in the right direction.

Arroyo, A. (2013). "I'm so fat!" The negative outcomes of fat talk. *Communication Currents, 7,* 1–2.

Arroyo, A., & Harwood, J. (2012). Exploring the causes and consequences of fat talk. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 40,* 167–187.

THE IMPACT OF LANGUAGE

As linguistic relativity suggests, language can have a strong influence on our perceptions and how we regard one another. In this section, we examine some of the many ways language can impact our lives.

NAMING AND IDENTITY

"What's in a name?" Juliet asked rhetorically. If Romeo had been a social scientist, he would have answered, "A great deal." Research has demonstrated that names are more than just a simple means of identification; they shape the way others think of us, the way we view ourselves, and the way we act (Lieberson, 2000).

For more than a century, researchers have studied the impact of rare and unusual names on the people who bear them (Christenfeld & Larsen, 2008). Early studies claimed that people with nonnormative names suffered everything from psychological and emotional disturbance to failure in college. Later studies show that people often have negative appraisals not only of unusual names, but also of unusual name spellings (e.g., Mehrabian, 2001). In one study, for example, people with unusual names were judged least likely to be hired (Cotton et al., 2008). Of course, what makes a name (and its spelling) unusual changes with time. In 1900, the 20 most popular names for baby girls in the United States included Bertha,

Baby naming is an important decision that can shape identity throughout life. ***What consequences have flowed from having your name? How might things have been different if you had been given a dramatically different name?***

Mildred, and Ethel. By 2015, the top 20 names included Madison, Mia, and Sophia—names that would have been highly unusual a century earlier (Social Security Administration, 2016).

Some people regard unique names as distinctive. You can probably think of four or five unique names—of celebrities, sports stars, or even personal friends—that make the person easily recognizable and memorable. In one study, a poem signed with an unusual name was assessed as more creative than when signed by a more common name (Lebuda & Karwowski, 2013). Sometimes the choice of unique names is connected with cultural identity. For example, in some parts of the United States, nearly a third of African American girls born in the 1990s were given distinctively black names that belonged to no one else in the state (Dinwiddie-Boyd, 1994). Researchers suggest that distinctive names like these are a symbol of solidarity with the African American community. Conversely, choosing a less distinctive name can be a way of integrating the baby into the majority culture.

AFFILIATION

An impressive body of research shows how language can build and demonstrate solidarity with others. Communicators adapt their speech in a variety of ways to indicate affiliation and accommodation, including through their choice of vocabulary, rate of talking, number and placement of pauses, and level of politeness (Giles, 2016). In one study, the likelihood of mutual romantic interest increased when conversation partners' use of pronouns, articles, conjunctions, prepositions, and negations matched (Ireland et al., 2011). The same study revealed that when couples used similar language styles while instant messaging, the chances of their relationship continuing increased by almost 50 percent.

Close friends and lovers often develop a set of special terms that serve as a way of signifying their relationship (Dunleavy & Booth-Butterfield, 2009). Using the same vocabulary sets these people apart from others. The same process works among members of larger groups, from street gangs to military units. **Convergence** is the process of adapting one's speech style to match that of others with whom one wants to identify (Dragojevic et al., 2016). Language matching creates bonds not only between friends in person but also between strangers online (Rains, 2016; Riordan et al., 2013).

When two or more people feel equally positive about one another, their linguistic convergence will be mutual. But when one communicator wants or needs approval, convergence is more one-sided (Muir et al., 2016). We see this process when employees seeking advancement start speaking more like their superiors. One study even showed that adopting the swearing patterns of bosses and coworkers in emails is a sign that an employee is fitting into an organization's culture (Lublin, 2017). See the At Work sidebar in this section for a discussion of this topic.

The principle of speech accommodation works in reverse, too. Communicators who want to set themselves apart from others adopt the strategy of **divergence**, speaking in a way that emphasizes their differences (Gasiorek & Vincze, 2016). For example, members of an ethnic group might use their own dialect as a way of showing solidarity with one another. The same can occur across age lines, such as teens who adopt the slang of subcultures other than their own to show divergence from adults (Reyes, 2005).

Of course, communicators need to be careful about when—and when not—to converge their language. For example, using ethnic or racial epithets when you're not a member of that in-group may be inappropriate and even offensive (O'Dea et al., 2015). One of the pragmatic goals of divergence is the creation of norms about who may use certain words and who may not.

POWER AND POLITENESS

Communication researchers have identified a number of language patterns that communicate more or less power (Dillard, 2014; Hosman & Siltanen, 2006). Notice the difference between these two statements from an employee to a manager:

> Excuse me, sir. I hate to say this, but I . . . uh . . . I guess I won't be able to finish the project on time. I had a personal emergency and . . . well . . . it was just impossible to finish it by today. I'll have it to you first thing on Monday, okay?

> I won't be able to finish the project on time. I had a personal emergency and it was impossible to finish it by today. I will have it to you first thing on Monday.

The first statement is an example of what has been called **powerless language**: tentative and indirect word choices, with hedges and hesitations ("Excuse me, sir"; "I guess"; "okay?"). The second is labeled **powerful language**: direct and forceful word choices, with declarations and assertions ("I won't"; "I will"). Studies have shown that speakers who use powerful speech are rated as more competent, dynamic, and attractive than speakers who sound powerless (Ng & Bradac, 1993; Reid & Ng, 1999). In addition, when it comes to employment interview outcomes, a powerful speech style results in more positive attributions of competence and employability than a powerless one (Parton et al., 2002).

@work Swearing on the Job

Swearing serves a variety of communication functions (Baruch et al., 2017). It's a way to express emotions and to let others know how strongly you feel. It can be part of a compliment ("that was #$&@ing terrific!") or the worst of insults. Swearing can offend and alienate, but it can also build solidarity and be a term of endearment.

Communication researchers Danette Johnson and Nicole Lewis (2010) investigated the effects of swearing in work settings. Not surprisingly, they found that the more formal the situation, the more negative the appraisal. The chosen swear word also made a difference: "F-bombs" were rated as more inappropriate than other less-volatile terms. When hearers were surprised by a speaker's swearing, they were likely to deem the person as incompetent—unless they were *pleasantly* surprised (Johnson, 2012).

Despite these findings, Stanford University professor Robert Sutton (2010) notes that choosing *not* to swear can actually violate the norms of some organizations. Moreover, he maintains that swearing on rare occasions can be effective for the shock value. (The fact that Sutton authored a book called *The No Asshole Rule* suggests he practices what he preaches.)

But even Sutton adds a cautionary note about swearing on the job: "If you are not sure, don't do it." The rules of interpersonal competence apply: Analyze and adapt to your audience, and engage in self-monitoring. And when in doubt, err on the side of restraint.

A *disclaimer* is a type of powerless speech that attempts to distance a speaker from remarks that might be unwelcome. For example, you might preface a critical message by saying, "I don't mean to sound judgmental, but . . ." and then go on to express your disapproval. One study showed that disclaimers actually *increase* negative judgments (El-Alayli et al., 2008). For instance, the phrase "I don't mean to sound arrogant" followed by a high-handed comment led subjects to regard the speaker as *more* arrogant. Disclaimers involving other negative qualities such as laziness and selfishness produced similar results. It seems that disclaimers backfire because they sensitize listeners to look for—and find—precisely the qualities that the speaker is trying to disavow.

Some scholars question the label "powerless" because tentative and indirect speech styles can sometimes achieve goals better than more assertive approaches (Lee & Pinker, 2010). For example, less forceful approaches can be attempts at **politeness**: communicating in ways that save face for both senders and receivers. Politeness is valued in some cultures more than others (Dunn, 2013). In Japan, saving face for others is an important goal, so communicators there tend to speak in ambiguous terms and use hedge words and qualifiers. In most Japanese sentences, the verb comes at the end of the sentence so the "action" part of the statement can be postponed. Traditional Mexican culture, with its strong emphasis on cooperation, also uses hedging to smooth over interpersonal relationships. By not taking a firm stand with their speech mannerisms, Mexicans believe they will not make others feel ill at ease.

Even in highly assertive cultures, simply counting the number of powerful or powerless statements won't always reveal who has the most control in a relationship. Social rules often mask the real distribution of power.

A boss who wants to be pleasant might say to a secretary, "Would you mind getting this file?" In truth, both boss and secretary know this is an order and not a request, but the questioning form makes the medicine less bitter. Sociolinguist Deborah Tannen (1994) describes how politeness can be a face-saving way of delivering an order:

> I hear myself giving instructions to my assistants without actually issuing orders: "Maybe it would be a good idea to . . ."; "It would be great if you could . . ." all the while knowing that I expect them to do what I've asked right away. . . . This rarely creates problems, though, because the people who work for me know that there is only one reason I mention tasks—because I want them done. I *like* giving instructions in this way; it appeals to my sense of what it means to be a good person . . . taking others' feelings into account. (p. 101)

As the proceeding quotation suggests, high-status speakers—especially higher-status women, according to Tannen—often realize that politeness is an effective way to get their needs met while protecting the dignity of the less-powerful person. The importance of achieving both content and relational goals helps explain why a mixture of powerful and polite speech is usually most effective (Geddes, 1992). The key involves adapting your style to your conversational partner (Loyd et al., 2010). If the other person is likely to perceive politeness as weakness, it may be necessary to shift to a more powerful speaking style. Conversely, if the person sees powerful speech as rude and insensitive, it might be best to use a more polite approach (Fandrich & Beck, 2012). As always, competent communication requires flexibility and adaptability.

DARK SIDE OF COMMUNICATION

Sorry, Not Sorry

On the surface, saying "I'm sorry" seems like a good communication practice. Indeed, Chapter 9 describes the importance of apologies and forgiveness in interpersonal relationships.

But scholars (Schumann & Ross, 2010) and social commentators note that women say "I'm sorry" far more than men do, often out of habit ("I'm sorry, may I sit here?"; "I'm sorry, could you please tell me. . ."). Although these ritual apologies are attempts to be polite, they can suggest weakness and even subservience. "*Sorry* is simply another way of downplaying our power, of softening what we do, to seem nice," observes Jessica Bennett (2014). "And yet, how can we be deemed likable and competent if we're always sounding defensive or unsure?"

The Pantene ad *Not Sorry* and a skit by comedian Amy Schumer offer serious and humorous commentaries about women's tendency to over-apologize. These videos are linked in an op-ed piece by Sloane Crosley (2015), who believes women should heighten their awareness of this issue and change the way they talk: "The sorrys are taking up airtime that should be used for making logical, declarative statements, expressing opinions and relaying impressions of what we want."

Of course, there are times when saying "I'm sorry" is gracious, responsible, and altogether appropriate. Competent communicators will want to monitor how often they use the phrase and how necessary it is to say it—and adapt their language accordingly.

SEXISM AND RACISM

Sexist language "includes words, phrases, and expressions that unnecessarily differentiate between females and males *or* exclude, trivialize, or diminish" either sex (Parks & Roberton, 2000, p. 415). This type of speech can affect the self-concepts of women and men, which is why one author (Lillian, 2007) argues that it is a form of hate speech.

ASSESSING YOUR COMMUNICATION

Sexist Language

SECTION I:

For each of the following statements, rate your agreement or disagreement on a scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 = "strongly disagree" and 5 = "strongly agree."

_____ **1.** Women who think that being called a "chairman" is sexist are misinterpreting the word "chairman."

_____ **2.** Worrying about sexist language is a trivial activity.

_____ **3.** If the original meaning of the word "he" was "person," we should continue to use "he" to refer to both males and females today.

_____ **4.** The elimination of sexist language is an important goal.

_____ **5.** Sexist language is related to sexist treatment of people in society.

_____ **6.** When teachers talk about the history of the United States, they should change expressions, such as "our forefathers" to expressions that include women.

_____ **7.** Teachers who require students to use nonsexist language are unfairly forcing their political views on their students.

SECTION II:

For each of the following situations, rate your willingness on a scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 = very unwilling and 5 = very willing.

_____ **8.** When you are referring to a married woman, how willing are you to use the title "Ms. Smith" rather than "Mrs. Smith"?

_____ **9.** How willing are you to use the word "server" rather than "waiter" or "waitress"?

_____ **10.** How willing are you to use the expression "husband and wife" rather than "man and wife"?

_____ **11.** How willing are you to use the title "flight attendant" instead of "steward" or "stewardess"?

This self-assessment contains 11 of the 21 items on the Inventory of Attitudes Toward Sexist/Nonsexist Language–General, developed by Parks and Roberton (2000).

For scoring information, see page 163 at the end of the chapter.

Suzanne Romaine (1999) offers several examples of how linguistic terms can subtly stereotype men and women. To say that a woman *mothered* her children focuses on her nurturing behavior, but to say that a man *fathered* a child talks only about his biological role. We are familiar with terms such as *working mother,* but there is no term *working father* because we assume (perhaps inaccurately) that men are the breadwinners.

Beyond just stereotyping, sexist language can stigmatize women. For example, the term *unmarried mother* is common, but we do not talk about *unmarried fathers* because for many people there is no stigma attached to this status for men. Whereas there are over 200 English words for promiscuous women, there are only 20 for men (Piercey, 2000). Perhaps that's why "attitude towards women" is a significant predictor of attitudes regarding nonsexist language (Parks & Roberton, 2008). Education and perspective taking are also positively related to mindsets about inclusive language.

There are at least two ways to eliminate sexist language (Lei, 2006; Rakow, 1992). The first circumvents the problem altogether by eliminating sex-specific terms or substituting neutral terms. For example, using the plural *they* eliminates the necessity for *he*, *she*, *she and he*, or *he and she*. In fact, "they" has become the pronoun of choice for many individuals (Hess, 2016). When no sex reference is appropriate, you can substitute neutral terms. For example, *mankind* may be replaced with *humanity*, *human beings*, *human race*, and *people; manmade* may be replaced with *artificial*, *manufactured*, and *synthetic; manpower* may be replaced with *labor*, *workers*, and *workforce;* and *manhood* may be replaced with *adulthood*. In the same way, *Congressmen* and *Congresswomen* are *members of Congress; firemen* and *firewomen* are *firefighters; chairmen* and *chairwomen* are *presiding officers*, *leaders*, and *chairs; foremen* and *forewomen* are *supervisors; policemen* and *policewomen* are both *police officers;* and *stewardesses* and *stewards* are both *flight attendants*. Of course, some terms refer to things that could not possibly have a sex—so, for example, a *manhole cover* is a *sewer lid*.

The second method for eliminating sexism is to mark sex clearly—to heighten awareness of whether the reference is to a female or a male. For example, rather than substitute *chairperson* for *chairman*, use the terms *chairman* and *chairwoman* to specify whether the person is a man or a woman. (Note, also, that there is nothing sacred about putting *he* before *she*; in fact, putting *she*, *her*, and *hers* after *he*, *him*, and *his*, without changing the order, continues to imply that males are the more important sex and should come first.)

Whereas sexist language usually defines the world as made up of superior men and inferior women, **racist language** reflects a worldview that classifies members of one racial group as superior and others as inferior (Asante, 2002). Not all language that might have racist overtones is deliberate. For example, the connotations of many words favor whites over people of color (Smith-McLallen et al., 2006):

> 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 white and black children as young as 3 years old . . . as well as among adults. (pp. 47–48)

An obvious step toward eliminating racist language is to make sure your communication is free of offensive labels and slurs (Guerin, 2003). Some troublesome language will be easy to identify, whereas other problematic uses will be subtler. For instance, you may be unaware of using racial and ethnic modifiers when describing others, such as "black professor" or "Pakistani merchant" (or modifiers identifying sex, such as "female doctor" or "male secretary"). Modifiers such as these usually aren't necessary, and they can be subtle indicators of racism/sexism. If you wouldn't typically use the phrases "white professor," "European American merchant," "male doctor," or "female secretary," then modifiers that identify race and sex might be indicators of attitudes and language that need to be changed.

PRECISION AND VAGUENESS

Most people assume that the goal of language is to make our ideas clear to one another. When clarity *is* the goal, we need language skills to make our ideas understandable to others. Sometimes, however, we want to be less than perfectly clear. In the following pages, we point out some cases where vagueness serves useful purposes as well as cases where complete understanding is the goal.

Ambiguous Language

Ambiguous language consists of words and phrases that have more than one commonly accepted definition. Some ambiguous language is amusing, as the following newspaper headlines illustrate:

Police Begin Campaign to Run Down Jaywalkers
Teacher Strikes Idle Kids
20-Year Friendship Ends at the Altar

Sometimes ambiguous language can lead to humorous misunderstandings. In other cases, though, the confusion can be more serious. ***How can you make sure your words don't create problems?***

Many misunderstandings that arise from ambiguity are trivial. We recall eating dinner at a Mexican restaurant and ordering a "tostada with beans." Instead of being served a beef tostada with beans on the side, we were surprised to see the waiter bring us a plate containing a tostada *filled* with beans. Other misunderstandings involving ambiguous messages can be more serious. A nurse gave one of her patients a scare when she told him that he "wouldn't be needing" his robe, books, and shaving materials anymore. The patient became quiet and moody. When the nurse inquired about the odd behavior, she discovered that the poor man had interpreted her statement to mean he was going to die soon. In fact, the nurse meant he would be going home shortly.

It's difficult to catch and clarify every instance of ambiguous language. For this reason, the responsibility for interpreting statements accurately rests in large part with the receiver. Seeking feedback of one sort or another—for example, by paraphrasing and questioning—can help clear up misunderstandings: "You say you love me, but you want to see other people. In my book, 'love' is exclusive. What about you?"

Abstraction

Abstractions are convenient ways of generalizing about similarities between several objects, people, ideas, or events. Figure 5.3 is an **abstraction ladder** that shows how we can use a range of specific to abstract terms for describing an object, event, or situation.

We use higher-level abstractions all the time. For instance, rather than saying "Thanks for washing the dishes, vacuuming the rug, and making the bed," we might more abstractly say "Thanks for cleaning up." In such everyday situations, abstractions can be a useful kind of verbal shorthand.

High-level abstractions can help communicators find face-saving ways to avoid confrontations and embarrassment (Eisenberg & Witten, 1987). If a friend apologizes for arriving late for a date, you can choose to brush off the incident instead of making it an issue by saying, "Don't worry. It wasn't the end of the world"—a true statement, but less specific than saying, "To tell you the truth, I was mad at the time, but I've cooled off now." If your boss asks your opinion of a new idea that you think is weaker than your own approach, but you don't want to disagree, you could respond with a higher-level abstraction by saying, "I never thought of it that way."

FIGURE 5.3 Abstraction Ladder. In this example, a boss gives feedback to an employee about career advancement at various levels of specificity.

Although vagueness does have its uses, highly abstract language can cause several types of problems. At the most basic level, the vagueness of some abstract language makes it hard to understand the meaning of a message. Telling the hairstylist "shorter" or "more casual" without providing more specific instructions might lead to an unpleasant surprise. Overly abstract language can also lead to stereotyping if, for instance, someone who has had one bad experience blames an entire group: "Marriage counselors are worthless"; "New Yorkers are all rude"; or "Men are no good." Overly abstract expressions such as these can cause people to think in problematic generalities, ignoring uniqueness.

You might assume that abstract statements will soften the blow of all critical messages, but research suggests that isn't always the case. People who use vague language to describe others' negative actions are rated as less likeable than those who use concrete language (Douglas & Sutton, 2010). By describing another's negative behavior in abstract terms, you may appear to have a hidden agenda. The effect was not found, however, when describing the positive behaviors of others.

You can make your language—and your thinking—less abstract and more clear by learning to form *behavioral descriptions* of your problems, goals, appreciations, complaints, and requests. We use the word *behavioral* because such descriptions move down the abstraction ladder to describe the specific, observable objects and actions we're thinking about. Table 5.1 shows how behavioral descriptions are much more clear and effective than vague, abstract statements.

Watch and Discuss

Look up and watch "Vague Facebook Posts—Congressional Hearings."

1) Consider how "vaguebooking" uses *abstract* and *ambiguous* language to achieve its goals.

2) Discuss the pros and cons of being intentionally vague on social media posts.

TABLE 5.1 Abstract Versus Behavioral Descriptions

	Abstract Description	Behavioral Description			Remarks
		Who Is Involved	In What Circumstances	Specific Behaviors	
Problem	I'm no good at meeting strangers.	People I'd like to date	At parties and in school	I think, "They'd never want to date me." I don't initiate conversations.	Behavioral description more clearly identifies thoughts and behaviors to change.
Goal	I'd like to be more assertive.	Phone and door-to-door solicitors	When I don't want the product or can't afford it	Instead of apologizing, I want to keep saying "I'm not interested" until they go away.	Behavioral description clearly outlines how to act; abstract description doesn't.
Appreciation	"You've been a great boss."	[no clarification necessary]	When I've needed to change my schedule because of school exams or assignments	"You've been so willing to rearrange my work schedule."	Give both abstract and behavioral descriptions for best results.
Complaint	"I don't like some of the instructors around here."	Professors A and B	In class, when students ask questions the professors think are stupid	They either answer in a sarcastic voice (you might demonstrate) or accuse us of not studying hard enough.	If talking to A or B, use only behavioral descriptions. With others, use both abstract and behavioral descriptions.
Request	"Quit bothering me!"	My friends X and Y	When I'm studying for exams	"Instead of asking me again and again to party with you, I wish you'd accept that I need to study tonight."	Behavioral description will reduce defensiveness and make it clear that you don't always want to be left alone.

Euphemism

Euphemisms (from a Greek word meaning "to use words of good omen") are innocuous terms substituted for blunt ones. A euphemism avoids a direct, literal reference to an event (such as "She died"), substituting terms describing its consequences ("She's no longer with us"); related events ("She took her last breath"); metaphors ("She jumped the last hurdle"); or other, more abstract associations (McGlone et al., 2006). Euphemisms

are typically used to soften the impact of information that might be unpleasant, both for oneself as well as for the other person (McCallum & McGlone, 2011). It's easy to imagine how a relational breakup might be easier to handle with the explanation "I'm not ready for commitment" than with "I want to date other people." We tend to use euphemisms more when talking with people of higher status, probably as a way to avoid offending them (Makin, 2004). When choosing how to broach difficult subjects, the challenge is to be as kind as possible without sacrificing either your integrity or the clarity of your message.

Relative Language

Relative language gains meaning by comparison. For example, do you attend a large or a small school? This depends on what you compare it to. Alongside a campus such as Ohio State's, with more than 60,000 students, your school may look small; but compared with a college of 1,500 students, yours may seem quite large. Relative words such as *fast* and *slow*, *near* and *far*, and *short* and *long* are clearly defined only through comparison.

Using relative terms without explaining them can lead to communication problems. Have you ever responded to someone's question about the weather by saying it was warm, only to find out the person thought it was cold? Have you followed a friend's advice and gone to a "cheap" restaurant, only to find that it was twice as expensive as you expected? Have classes you heard were "easy" turned out to be hard? The problem in each case resulted from failing to link the relative word to a more measurable term.

One way to make words more measurable is to turn them into numbers. Health care practitioners have learned that patients often use vague wording when describing their pain: "It hurts a little"; "I'm pretty sore." The use of a numeric pain scale can give a more precise response—and lead to a better diagnosis (Prentice, 2005). When patients are asked to rank their pain from 1 to 10, with 10 being the most severe pain they've ever experienced, the number 7 is much more

Media Clip

Damning with Faint Praise: *Florence Foster Jenkins*

Florence Foster Jenkins (Meryl Streep) is a wealthy and well-connected socialite who has one remaining ambition in life: to share her singing talent with the world. Unfortunately, her vocal abilities are mediocre at best and ear-piercing at worst. But no one has the heart or courage to tell her.

Jenkins is surrounded with people who artfully dodge making blunt appraisals of her singing. Notice how her vocal coach uses abstract language in this exchange to avoid telling her the painful truth:

Coach: You've never sounded better.

Florence: Maestro, it is true that a lot of singers my age are on the decline, but I seem to get better and better.

Coach: I know, it's hard to believe, isn't it?

Florence: Well, I am so blessed.

Coach: There is no one quite like you.

Chapter 3 described how equivocation can be a strategy for evading the truth without technically lying. It's easy to understand why Jenkins's supporters choose this approach.

concrete and specific than "It aches a bit." The same technique can be used when asking people to relate anything from the movies they've seen to their job satisfaction.

Evaluative Language

Evaluative language (sometimes also called *emotive language*) seems to describe something but really announces the speaker's attitude toward it (Defour, 2008; Harding, 2007). If you approve of a friend's roundabout approach to a difficult subject, you might call her "tactful"; if you don't like it, you might accuse her of "beating around the bush."

You can appreciate how evaluative words are really editorial statements when you consider these examples:

If You Approve, Say	If You Disapprove, Say
thrifty	cheap
traditional	old-fashioned
extrovert	loudmouth
cautious	coward
progressive	radical
information	propaganda
eccentric	crazy

THE LANGUAGE OF RESPONSIBILITY

Besides providing a way to make the content of a message clear or obscure, language reflects the speaker's willingness to take responsibility for her or his beliefs, feelings, and actions. This acceptance or rejection of responsibility says a great deal about the speaker, and it can shape the tone of a relationship. To see how, read on.

"It" Statements

Notice the difference between the sentences in each set:

"It's worrying when you're late."
"I'm worried when you're late."

"It's a bad idea."
"I don't think that's a good idea."

"It's a problem."
"I see it as a problem."

As their name implies, **"it" statements** replace the personal pronouns *I* and *me* with the less immediate construction *it's*. By contrast, **"I" language** clearly identifies the speaker as the source of a message. Communicators who use "it" statements avoid ownership of a message. This habit isn't just

imprecise; it's a subtle, potentially unconscious way for someone to avoid taking a position.

"But" Statements

Statements that take the form "X-but-Y" can be quite confusing. A closer look at the **"but" statement** explains why. *But* has the effect of canceling the thought that precedes it:

"You're really a great person, but I think we ought to stop seeing each other."
"You've done good work for us, but we're going to have to let you go."
"This paper has some good ideas, but I'm giving it a grade of *D* because it's late."

"Buts" *can* be a face-saving strategy worth using at times. When the goal is to be absolutely clear, however, the most responsible approach will deliver the central idea without the distractions that can come with "but" statements. Break statements such as the preceding ones into two sentences, and then explain each one as necessary. Doing so lets you acknowledge both parts of the statement without contradicting yourself.

"I," "You," and "We" Language

We've already seen that "I" language is a way of accepting responsibility for a message. **"You" language**, by contrast, expresses a judgment of the other person. Positive judgments ("You did a great job!") rarely cause problems, but notice how each of the following critical "you" statements implies that the subject of the complaint is doing something wrong:

"You left this place a mess!"
"You didn't keep your promise!"
"You're really crude sometimes!"

"You" language is likely to arouse defensiveness. It implies that the speaker is qualified to judge the target—not an idea that most listeners are willing to accept. "I" language provides a more accurate and less provocative way to express a complaint (Simmons et al., 2005). By using "I" language, you can describe your reaction to someone's behavior, taking responsibility for your statement without expressing judgment. Communicators who use these kinds of "I" messages engage in **assertiveness**—clearly expressing their thoughts, feelings, and wants (Alberti & Emmons, 2008).

Assertive messages are composed of three different types of "I" statements. One describes the other person's behavior; one describes your feelings; and one describes the consequences the other's behavior has for you. Here are some examples of complete assertive messages:

"I get embarrassed [your feeling] when I hear you talk about my poor grades in front of our friends [the behavior you observed]. I'm afraid they'll think I'm stupid [the possible consequence]."
"Because I was waiting for you to pick me up this morning [behavior], I was late for class and wound up getting chewed out by the professor [consequences]. That's why I got so angry [feeling]."

"I haven't been very affectionate [consequence] because I've noticed that you've hardly spent any time with me in the past few weeks [behavior]. I'm confused [feeling] about how you feel about me."

When the chances of being misunderstood or getting a defensive reaction are high, it's a good idea to include all three elements in your assertive message. In some cases, however, using only one or two of them will get the job done:

"I'm feeling annoyed because I went to a lot of trouble fixing this dinner, and now it's cold." [The behavior is obvious.]
"I'm worried because I haven't heard from you." ["Worried" is both a feeling and a consequence in this statement.]

Even the best-constructed and best-delivered "I" message won't always receive a nondefensive response (Bippus & Young, 2005). As Thomas Gordon (1970) points out, "nobody welcomes hearing that his behavior is causing someone a problem, no matter how the message is phrased" (p. 145). Furthermore, "I" language in large doses can start to sound egotistical (Proctor, 1989). Research shows that self-absorbed people, also known as "conversational narcissists," can be identified by their constant use of first-person singular pronouns (Vangelisti et al., 1990; Zimmermann et al., 2013). For this reason, "I" language works best in moderation.

One way to avoid overuse of "I" language is to consider the pronoun *we*. **"We" language** implies that the issue is the concern and responsibility of both the speaker and receiver of a message. Consider a few examples:

"We have a problem. We can't seem to talk about money without fighting."
"We aren't doing a very good job of keeping the apartment clean, are we?"
"We need to talk to your parents about whether we'll visit them for the holidays."

"We" language can help build a constructive climate. It suggests a kind of "we're in this together" orientation, a component of what is known as *verbal immediacy* (Turman, 2008). In one study (Fitzsimons & Kay, 2004), strangers who were required to use "we" instead of "you and I" in their interactions felt closer to one another after doing so. Couples who use "we" language are more satisfied and manage conflict better than those who rely more heavily on "I" and "you" pronouns (Seider et al., 2009). "We-talk" is also helpful for couples when one partner is dealing with a health issue (Rohrbaugh et al., 2012). Using plural pronouns suggests the medical problem is "ours" rather than "mine" or "yours."

On the other hand, using the pronoun "we" can be presumptuous and even demanding because you are speaking for the other person as well as for yourself (Rentscher et al., 2013). It's easy to imagine someone responding to the statement "*We* have a problem . . ." by saying "Maybe *you* have a problem, but don't tell me *I* do!" Look again at the "we" language examples offered above and imagine that you don't agree with the

TABLE 5.2 Pros, Cons, and Recommendations for Using "I," "You," and "We" Language

Pronoun	Pros	Cons	Recommendations
"I" Language	• Takes responsibility for personal thoughts, feelings, and wants. • Less defense provoking than evaluative "you" language.	• Can be perceived as egotistical, narcissistic, and self-absorbed.	• Use descriptive "I" messages in conflicts or confrontations when the other person does not perceive a problem. • Combine "I" with "we" language in conversations.
"You" Language	• Signals other-orientation, particularly when the topic is positive.	• Can sound evaluative and judgmental, particularly during confrontations.	• Avoid during confrontations. • Use "you" language when praising or including others.
"We" Language	• Signals inclusion, immediacy, cohesiveness, and commitment.	• Can speak improperly for others.	• Use in group settings to enhance sense of unity. • Avoid when expressing personal thoughts, feelings, and wants. • Combine with "I" language, particularly in personal conversations.

speaker's conclusions. In that case, you would probably feel defensive rather than included.

As Table 5.2 summarizes, all three pronouns—*I*, *you*, and *we*—have their advantages and disadvantages. Given this fact, what advice can we give about the most effective pronouns to use in interpersonal communication? One study (Proctor & Wilcox, 1993) offers an answer. The researchers found that "I"/"we" combinations (e.g., "I think that we . . ." or "I would like to see us . . .") were strongly endorsed by college students, particularly for confrontational conversations in romantic relationships (cf. Sendén et al., 2014). Richard Slatcher and his associates (2008) came to a similar conclusion: There is value in both "I" and "we" messages in relational communication, as these pronouns demonstrate both autonomy and connection (see Chapter 9 for a discussion of these relational dialectics).

Because too much of any pronoun comes across as inappropriate, combining pronouns is generally a good idea—and it suggests you're able to see things from multiple perspectives (Pennebaker, 2011). If your "I" language reflects your position without being overly self-absorbed, your "you" language shows concern for others without judging them, and your "we" language includes others without speaking for them, you will probably come as close as possible to the ideal mix of pronouns.

GENDER AND LANGUAGE

So far we have discussed language usage as if it were identical for women and men. Are there differences between male and female language use? If so, how important are they?

EXTENT OF GENDER DIFFERENCES

Some people believe that men and women communicate in significantly different ways, whereas others find far more similarities than differences. We outline two approaches that represent two different sides in the gender and language debate.

Approach 1: Significant Differences

In 1992, John Gray argued that men and women are so fundamentally different that they might as well have come from separate planets. In his best-selling book *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*, he claimed:

> Men and women differ in all areas of their lives. Not only do men and women communicate differently but they think, feel, perceive, react, respond, love, need, and appreciate differently. They almost seem to be from different planets, speaking different languages and needing different nourishment. (p. 5)

Gray's work is based largely on anecdotes and conjecture and lacks scholarly support. However, social scientists have acknowledged that there are some significant differences in the way men and women behave socially (Palomares, 2008; Wood & Fixmer-Oraiz, 2017). These findings have led some scholars to describe males and females as members of distinct cultures, with their differences arising primarily from socialization rather than biology. The best known advocate of this "two-culture" theory is sociolinguist Deborah Tannen (1990, 1994, 2001). She suggests that men and women grow up learning different rules about how to speak and act.

In support of the two-culture hypothesis, communication researcher Anthony Mulac (2006; see also Mulac et al., 2013) reports that men are more likely than women to speak in sentence fragments ("Nice photo."). Men more typically talk about themselves with "I" references ("I have a lot of meetings") and use more judgmental language. They are also more likely to make directive statements. By contrast, Mulac finds that female speech is more tentative, elaborate, and emotional. For instance, women's sentences are typically longer than men's. Women also make more reference to feelings and use intensive adverbs ("He's *really* interested") that paint a more complete verbal picture. In addition, female speech is often less assertive. It contains more statements of uncertainty ("It seems to be . . ."), hedges ("We're *kind of* set in our ways."), and tag questions ("Do you think so?"). Some theorists have argued that such differences cause women's speech to be less powerful, but more inclusive, than men's.

Communication scholar Julia Wood (Wood & Fixmer-Oraiz, 2017) has devoted much of her career to analyzing the impact of sex and gender

TABLE 5.3 Differences in Feminine and Masculine Communication Practices

Feminine	Masculine
Converse to maintain relationships	Converse to establish control
Create a climate of equality	Create a sense of power and status
Offer emotional support	Solve tasks and problems
Ask questions	Make statements
Offer concrete personal disclosures	Make abstract generalizations
Speak tentatively (often to be polite)	Speak assertively (often to be in charge)

Adapted from Wood, J. T., & Fixmer-Oraiz, N. (2017). *Gendered lives: Communication, gender, & culture* (12th ed.). Boston, MA: Cengage.

on communication. While she maintains that Gray's "Mars and Venus" approach is an overstatement that can do more harm than good, she acknowledges there are differences in what she terms "feminine and masculine communication practices," as summarized in Table 5.3.

Approach 2: Minor Differences

Despite the differences in the way men and women speak, the link between gender and language use isn't as clear-cut as it might seem (Timmerman, 2002). One meta-analysis involving more than 3,000 participants found that women were only slightly more likely than men to use tentative speech (Leaper & Robnett, 2011). Three other analyses (Leaper & Ayres, 2007) looked for gender differences in adults' talkativeness, affiliative speech, and assertive speech—and found negligible differences for all three language constructs. In essence, these studies showed that men's and women's speech are far more similar than different.

A recent study offers further support for the "minor differences" approach (Hancock et al., 2015). Researchers asked men and women to describe a health-related episode in their lives. Analysis of the transcripts revealed that women used slightly more intense adverbs and personal pronouns than men did. However, participants who read the transcripts were largely unable to identify the speaker's gender. The same researchers then asked men, women, and transgender women to describe a painting. Studied closely, the transgender women's word choices were slightly more similar to men's than to women's—but again, most people could not distinguish between them on the basis of word choice.

In light of the considerable similarities in language use across gender, communication researcher Kathryn Dindia (2006) suggests that the "men are from Mars, women are from Venus" claim should be replaced by the metaphor that "men are from North Dakota, women are from South Dakota."

When occupational roles drive conversation, gender differences in language use can fade or disappear. ***Are there occasions in your life when the influence of gender disappears from your conversations?***

NON-GENDER INFLUENCES ON LANGUAGE USE

Gender isn't the only factor that influences how women and men use language. Other factors can outweigh, or at least mitigate, the influences of gender when it comes to language use.

Occupation is one such factor. As an example, male and female athletes communicate in similar ways (Sullivan, 2004). Male day care teachers' speech to their students resembles the language of female teachers more closely than it resembles the language of fathers at home (Gleason & Greif, 1983). Female farm operators, working in a male-dominated world, reproduce the masculinity that spells success for their male counterparts, swearing and talking "tough as nails" (Pilgeram, 2007).

Another factor that can trump gender is *power*. For instance, in gay and lesbian relationships, the conversational styles of partners are more strongly linked to power differences in the relationship (e.g., who is earning more money) than to gender (Steen & Schwartz, 1995). There are also few differences between the way men and women use threatening speech when they have the same amount of bargaining strength in a negotiation (Scudder & Andrews, 1995). Findings like these suggest that characteristically feminine or masculine speech has been less a function of gender or sex than of social power historically. In fact, differences in social status often show up more clearly in language than gender differences do (Pennebaker, 2011).

What then is the verdict on gender's effects on language? The simple answer is that there are some differences between male and female language patterns. However, those distinctions may not be as significant as some claim—and they might occur for reasons other than the gender or biological sex of the communicator. Language differences by gender are sometimes easier to spot and measure in online communication, as we discuss in the next section.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND LANGUAGE

The principles described so far in this chapter apply to language in both face-to-face interaction and mediated communication. However, researchers have begun to discover some unique dimensions of language as it is used in social media. In this section, we focus on two topics covered throughout this book—impression management and gender—and describe how they show up in online language choices.

ONLINE LANGUAGE AND IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

As we noted in Chapter 3, much of online communication is an exercise in impression management. For example, text message errors can make the sender look bad to some recipients (such as professors, bosses, and

customers), so it's important to manage those impressions. One way to do so is by using a block signature indicating that a text message was typed on a mobile device (Carr & Stefaniak, 2012). Some texters' signatures point-blank say, "This was written on my cell phone, so please excuse the likely errors." This in essence shifts the blame for the mistakes from the message sender to the device.

Dating websites are all about impression management (Tomlinson, 2013). Subscribers to online dating services can manipulate not only their photos and videos but also their self-descriptions. Women are more likely than men to lie about their weight on dating sites, whereas men more often misrepresent their professions and income (Huestis, 2010). Even a person's first name can create an online impression (Gebauer et al., 2012). A German study found that men named Alexander were 102 percent more likely to get visits on a dating site than those named Kevin. (Although Kevin is a popular name in the United States, it is so unpopular in German-speaking countries that its negative appraisal is dubbed "Kevinism.")

Impression management isn't restricted to the search for romantic partners. Facebook friends also try to put their best foot forward with strategic language choices (Bazarova et al., 2012). They tend to use more positive emotion words in their public status updates, projecting an upbeat persona, than in private messages. In addition, Facebook users choose warmer language when posting on a close friend's wall than on a distant acquaintance's, indicating their friendship status to a larger audience.

FOCUS ON RESEARCH

The Language of Online Community

Wikipedia is more than just a free encyclopedia. It's also a community of editors and administrators who work together online, building relationships as they go. A team led by Daniela Iosub analyzed the contributors' "talk pages" to see what they reveal about the language patterns of the Wikipedia community.

The researchers collected data from nearly 12,000 contributors who had written at least 100 comments apiece on the English Wikipedia talk pages. After running the data through lexicon-based computer programs, the analysts drew conclusions related to status and gender.

Status: Administrators, who hold a higher rank than editors, tend to use more neutral, impersonal, and formal words. Editors, on the other hand, communicate more emotionally and relationally—that is, they use language to form and maintain connections with each other. An administrator might say, "That idea has merit." An editor might phrase it this way: "I really like your suggestion."

Gender: Compared with male contributors, women tend to communicate in ways that promote social and emotional connection ("We're making good progress—thanks for your input"), regardless of their status in the community. Female editors are the most relationship-oriented, whereas male administrators are the least.

The researchers suggest that if the Wikipedia community wants to grow, its administrators would do well to adopt a more relational style of communicating. One way to achieve this would be to increase the number of female administrators. An alternative would be for male contributors to develop a warmer, more personal style—because that helps build community.

Iosub, D., Laniado, D., Castillo, C., Morell, M. F., & Kaltenbrunner, A. (2014). Emotions under discussion: Gender, status and communication in online collaboration. *PLoS ONE, 9,* e104880.

Although email has become a less popular means of online communication, it's still a mainstay in the business world. Executives acknowledge that they attempt to manage impressions in the way they craft their emails (Caron et al., 2013). For instance, their professional messages are less formal when written on smartphones than on office computers. Those sent from mobile devices often begin without a salutation and go straight into business talk. When written from an office computer, they tend to start with a greeting and first name ("Hello, Mary"). Email closings follow a similar pattern. Executives say this isn't an accident—when communicating by smartphone, they want to give the impression that they are busy and "don't have time to be friendly."

ONLINE LANGUAGE AND GENDER

Research shows that men and women have different written language styles (Pennebaker, 2011), which shows up in online communication (Hosseinei & Tammimy, 2016). For instance, men tend to use more large words, nouns, and swear words than women do. By contrast, women use more personal pronouns, verbs, and hedge phrases (e.g., "I think"). Of course, word count doesn't tell the whole story. For instance, whereas women and men use the word "we" about equally, they do so in different ways. Closer scrutiny suggests that women are more likely to use what's known as the "warm we" ("We have so much fun together"), while men are more inclined toward the "distant we" ("We need to do something about this."). Although there are indeed gender differences in written language usage, they aren't absolute. Computer programs can correctly identify the sex of an author 67 to 72 percent of the time (50 percent is chance).

Data gathered from social networking sites show even greater distinctions. In one study, researchers analyzed more than 15 million Facebook status updates from approximately 75,000 volunteers over a 34-month period (Schwartz et al., 2013). There were marked differences in male and female language use (and also between people of different ages and personalities). Women used more emotion words ("excited"; "wonderful") and first-person singular pronouns, and they made more references to the people in their lives. Men made more object references ("game";

"government"; "Xbox") and swore far more often—a finding that seems to hold true across every study conducted about male and female word use.

It appears that people are intuitively aware of gender differences in online language. For instance, one study found that online communicators adopt different writing styles depending on their online gender identities (Palomares & Lee, 2010). Participants were given randomly selected gendered avatars—some matching their biological sex, some not. Communicators who were assigned feminine avatars expressed more emotion, made more apologies, and used more tentative language than did those with masculine avatars. In other words, participants adapted their language to match linguistic gender stereotypes.

Online language differences between the sexes are more pronounced among adolescents. A study looked at the word choices of teenage boys and girls in chat rooms (Kapidzic & Herring, 2011). The boys were more active and assertive, initiating interaction and making proposals, whereas the girls were more reactive ("wow"; "omg"; "lmao"). The boys were also more flirtatious and sexual ("any hotties wanna chat?"). The researchers noted that these accentuated differences were probably due to the age of the participants and that some of the distinctions would likely recede in adulthood.

It's important to remember that the words you use online say a lot about you. They reflect who you are and how you feel about others. And keep in mind that online messages can be recorded and saved. They can leave lasting reminders of your affinity for others, or they might come back to haunt you. As is true of face-to-face interaction, choose and use your words carefully.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Objective 5.1 Explain the symbolic, rule-based, subjective, culture-bound nature of language.

Language is both a marvelous communication tool and the source of many interpersonal problems. Every language is a collection of symbols governed by a variety of rules. Because of its symbolic nature, language is not a precise vehicle; its meanings rest in people, not in words themselves. Finally, the very language we speak can shape our worldview.

Q: Describe how a recent, important communicative exchange from your life illustrates the symbolic, rule-based, subjective, culture-bound nature of language.

Objective 5.2 Recognize the impact, both positive and negative, of language in interpersonal relationships.

Language both reflects and shapes the perceptions of its users. For example, names that people are given can influence their identity and the way they are viewed by others. Language also reflects the level of affiliation communicators have with each other. And language patterns reflect and shape a speaker's perceived power. Finally, language can reflect and influence sexist and racist attitudes.

When used carelessly, language can lead to a variety of interpersonal problems. The level of precision or vagueness of messages can affect a receiver's

understanding of them. Both precise messages and vague, evasive messages have their uses in interpersonal relationships; and a competent communicator has the ability to choose the optimal level of precision for the situation at hand. Competent communicators also know how to use "I," "you," and "we" statements to accept the optimal level of responsibility and relational harmony. Using emotive terms can lead to unnecessary disharmony in interpersonal relationships.

Q: Analyze your language use over two days to identify both how it facilitates relationships and how it creates interpersonal problems.

Objective 5.3 Describe the influence gender has on language use in interpersonal relationships.

The relationship between gender and language is a complex one. Although some writers in the popular press have argued that men and women are radically different and thus speak different languages, this position isn't supported by scholarship. A growing body of research suggests that what differences do exist are relatively minor in light of the similarities between the sexes. Many of the language differences that first appear to be sex-related may actually be due to other factors such as occupation and interpersonal power.

Q: Identify similarities and differences in male and female language use, and provide explanations for such differences.

Objective 5.4 Identify ways in which online language usage is different from the in-person variety.

Language use in social media has some distinct features. Word choice is an important component of online impression management. Gender differences are also more pronounced (or at least more measurable) when written via social media.

Q: Analyze your social media messages to see whether they reflect the identity you wish to project.

KEY TERMS

Abstraction ladder (149)
Ambiguous language (148)
Assertiveness (153)
"But" statement (153)
Convergence (142)
Divergence (143)
Euphemism (150)
Evaluative language (152)
"I" language (152)
"It" statement (152)
Linguistic relativity (139)
Phonological rules (137)
Politeness (144)
Powerful language (143)
Powerless language (143)
Pragmatic rules (138)
Racist language (147)
Relative language (151)
Sapir–Whorf hypothesis (139)
Semantic rules (138)
Sexist language (145)
Syntactic rules (137)
"We" language (154)
"You" language (153)

ACTIVITIES

1. Working with a group of classmates, describe one syntactic, one semantic, and one pragmatic rule for each situation:

a. Asking an acquaintance out for a first date.
b. Declining an invitation to a party.
c. Responding to a stranger who has just said "excuse me" after bumping into you in a crowd.

2. The information about the impact of language on pages 141–155 shows how the words a communicator chooses can shape others' perceptions. Create and present to your class two scenarios for each type of linguistic influence in the following list. The first should describe how the type of influence could be used constructively, and the

second should describe an unethical application of this knowledge.

a. Naming and identity
b. Affiliation
c. Power
d. Sexism and racism

3. Translate the following into behavioral language and share with your classmates to get their feedback.

a. An abstract goal for improving your interpersonal communication (e.g., "Be more assertive" or "Stop being so sarcastic").
b. A complaint you have about another person (for instance, that he or she is "selfish" or "insensitive").

In both cases, describe the person or people involved, the circumstances in which the communication will take place, and the precise behaviors involved. What difference will using the behavioral descriptions be likely to make in your relationships?

4. With a group of classmates, practice rephrasing each of the following "you" statements in "I" and/or "we" language:

"You're not telling me the truth!"

"You only think of yourself!"

"Don't be so touchy!"

"You don't understand a word I'm saying!"

Now think of three "you" statements you could make to people in your life. Transform each of these statements into "I" and "we" language, and rehearse them with a classmate.

5. Some authors believe that differences between male and female communication are so great that they can be characterized as "men are from Mars, women are from Venus." Other researchers believe the differences aren't nearly so dramatic and would describe them as "men are from North Dakota, women are from South Dakota." Which approach seems more accurate to you? Offer experiences from your life to support your point of view.

6. Do you communicate differently online or by text than in person? Does your social media language differ depending on the medium you use? Monitor your communication over three days and see if you "talk" distinctly in text messages, social networking posts, tweets, and blog entries compared with face-to-face communication. Are there some words you're more prone to use on Facebook, for example, than in person?

SCORING FOR ASSESSING YOUR COMMUNICATION (PAGE 146)

Add your responses to the 11 statements, making sure to reverse-score statements 1, 2, and 3 (if you indicated 5, change it to 1; change 4 to 2; change 2 to 4; and change 1 to 5). Scores can range from 11 to 55. Scores that are 38 or higher reflect a supportive attitude toward nonsexist language; scores between 11 and 27 reflect a negative attitude toward nonsexist language; and scores between 28 and 37 reflect a neutral attitude. Scholars note that women are typically less tolerant of sexist language than are men, which may have an impact on these scores (Douglas & Sutton, 2014).

6

Nonverbal Communication

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

6.1 Define nonverbal communication.

6.2 Describe the distinguishing characteristics of nonverbal communication.

6.3 Identify and offer examples of the various functions that nonverbal communication can serve.

6.4 Describe how meaning is communicated through particular nonverbal cues.

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People don't always say what they mean . . . but their gestures and movements tell the truth!
Will he ask you out? Is she encouraging you?
Learn the secret language of body signals. You can improve your:
sex life . . .
social life . . .
business life . . .
Read Body Language *to reveal the secrets. . .*
Do his eyes say he's interested?
Do her facial expressions say she's a manipulator?
Does the way he's standing say he's a player?

ALMOST EVERY pharmacy, supermarket, and airport book rack has its share of "body language" paperbacks with claims such as these. Popular seminars and YouTube videos make similar assertions. They promise you can learn secrets that will transform you from a bumbling social failure into a self-assured mind reader.

Such claims are almost always exaggerations or fabrications. Don't misunderstand: There *is* a scientific body of knowledge about nonverbal communication, and it *has* provided many fascinating and valuable clues to human behavior. That's what this chapter is about. It's unlikely the next few pages will turn you instantly into a rich, sexy, charming communication superstar, but don't go away. Even without glamorous promises, a quick look at some facts about nonverbal communication shows that it's an important and valuable field to study—and that nonverbal skills are worth acquiring (Riggio, 2006).

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION DEFINED

If *non* means "not" and *verbal* means "with words," then it seems logical that *nonverbal communication* would involve "communication without words." This definition is an oversimplification, however, because it fails to distinguish between *vocal* communication (with the voice) and *verbal* communication (with words). Some nonverbal messages have a vocal element. For example, the words "I love you" have different meanings depending on the way they are spoken. Furthermore, some nonspoken forms of communication, including sign languages used in the Deaf community, are actually linguistic and not really nonverbal in the sense most social scientists use the term. Therefore, a better definition of **nonverbal communication** is "messages expressed by nonlinguistic means."

These nonlinguistic messages are important because what we *do* often conveys more meaning than what we *say*. One early study (Mehrabian, 1972) claimed that 93 percent of the emotional impact of a message comes from a nonverbal source, whereas only a paltry 7 percent is verbal. Another (Birdwhistell, 1970) described a 65–35 percent split between actions and words, respectively. Although social scientists have disputed these figures

and the relative importance of verbal versus nonverbal cues (e.g., Lapakko, 1997; Nagel et al., 2012), the point remains: Nonverbal communication contributes a great deal to shaping perceptions.

You might ask how nonverbal communication can be so powerful. At first glance, it seems as if meanings come from words. To answer this question, recall a time when you observed speakers of an unfamiliar language communicating. Although you couldn't understand the words being spoken, there were likely plenty of clues that gave you an idea of what was going on in the exchange. By tuning into facial expressions, postures, gestures, vocal tones, and other behaviors, you probably gained a sense of the communicators' relationship. Researchers (summarized in Knapp & Hall, 2010) have found that subjects who hear content-free speech—ordinary speech that has been electronically manipulated so that the words are unintelligible—can consistently recognize the emotion being expressed and identify its strength.

Minions use an incomprehensible "language," but audiences make sense of their messages by interpreting nonverbal, paralinguistic, and contextual cues. ***What might you infer about the relationships in the photo above?***

CHARACTERISTICS OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

As Table 6.1 shows, verbal and nonverbal communication differ in a number of important ways. We now take a look at five characteristics of nonverbal communication.

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION IS ALWAYS OCCURRING

Some theorists suggest that *all* nonverbal behavior communicates information. They argue that it is impossible *not* to communicate. You can

TABLE 6.1 Some Differences Between Verbal and Nonverbal Communication

Verbal Communication	Nonverbal Communication
• Mostly voluntary and conscious	• Often unconscious
• Usually content oriented	• Usually relational
• Can be clear or vague	• Inherently ambiguous
• Primarily shaped by culture	• Rooted in biology
• Discontinuous/intermittent	• Continuous
• Single channel (words only)	• Multichanneled

understand the impossibility of non-communication by considering what you would do if someone told you not to communicate any messages at all. Even if you closed your eyes or left the room, these behaviors would communicate messages that mean you're avoiding contact. One study (DePaulo, 1992) took just this approach. When communicators were told not to express nonverbal clues, others viewed them as dull, withdrawn, uneasy, aloof, and deceptive.

The impossibility of not communicating is significant because it means that each of us is a kind of transmitter that cannot be shut off. No matter what we do, we send out messages that say something about ourselves and our relationships with others. If, for instance, others were observing you now, what nonverbal clues would they get about how you're feeling? Are you sitting forward or reclining? Is your posture tense or relaxed? What does your facial expression communicate now? Can you make your face expressionless? Don't people with expressionless faces communicate something to you? Even uncontrollable behaviors can convey a message. You may not intend to show that you're embarrassed, but your blushing can still be a giveaway.

Of course, not all behaviors (intentional or not) will be interpreted correctly: Your trembling hands might be taken as a sign of nervousness when you're really just shivering from the cold. But whether or not your behavior is intentional, and whether or not it is interpreted accurately, all nonverbal behavior has the potential to create messages.

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION IS PRIMARILY RELATIONAL

Some nonverbal messages serve practical functions, such as when a police officer directs the flow of traffic. But nonverbal communication also serves in a far more common (and more interesting) series of *social* functions.

Nonverbal communication allows us to demonstrate the kind of relationships we have—or want to have—with others (Burgoon & Le Poire, 1999; Myers et al., 2011). You can appreciate this fact by thinking about the wide range of ways you could behave when greeting another person. You could wave, shake hands, nod, smile, clap the other person on the

back, give a hug, or avoid all contact. Each one of these behaviors sends a message about the nature of your relationship with the other person.

Nonverbal messages perform another valuable social function: They convey emotions that we may be unwilling or unable to express, or ones we may not even be aware of. In fact, nonverbal communication is much better suited to expressing attitudes and feelings than it is ideas. You can prove this for yourself by imagining how you could express each item on the following list nonverbally:

1. "I'm tired."
2. "I'm in favor of capital punishment."
3. "I'm attracted to another person in the group."
4. "I think school prayer should be allowed."
5. "I'm angry at someone in this room."

This experience shows that, short of charades, ideas (such as statements 2 and 4) don't lend themselves to nonverbal expressions nearly as well as attitudes and feelings (statements 1, 3, and 5). This explains why it's possible to understand the attitudes or feelings of others by reading nonverbal cues, even if you aren't able to understand the subject of their communication.

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION IS AMBIGUOUS

In Chapter 5, we pointed out how some language can be ambiguous. (For example, the statement "That nose piercing really makes you stand out" could be a compliment or a criticism; and the vague statement "I'm almost done" could mean you have to wait a few minutes or an hour.) Most nonverbal behavior has the potential to be even more ambiguous than verbal statements such as these. To understand why, consider how you would interpret silence from your companion during an evening together. Think of all the possible meanings of this nonverbal behavior: warmth, anger, preoccupation, boredom, nervousness, thoughtfulness—the possibilities are many.

A supermarket chain inadvertently illustrated the ambiguity of nonverbal behavior when it instructed employees to smile and make eye contact with customers. Unfortunately, some customers mistook the service-with-a-smile approach as sexual come-ons. As this story suggests, nonverbal cues are much more ambiguous than verbal statements when it comes to expressing a willingness to become physically involved (La France, 2010).

Because nonverbal behavior is so ambiguous, caution is wise when you are responding to nonverbal cues. Rather than jumping to conclusions about the meaning of a sigh, smile, slammed door, or yawn, it's far better to use the kind of perception-checking approach described in Chapter 4. "When you yawned, I thought I was boring you. But maybe you're just tired. What's going on?" Considering more than one possible interpretation for nonverbal behavior is an element of communication competence. Popular advice on the subject notwithstanding, it's usually not possible to read a person like a book.

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION OCCURS IN MEDIATED MESSAGES

Not all mediated communication is verbal. Video calls obviously provide nonverbal information, as do photos on social networking sites. Even text-based digital communication has nonverbal features.

The most obvious way to represent nonverbal expressions in type is with *emoticons*, using keyboard characters such as :-) for a smile or :-O to express surprise. Many programs now turn these keystroke combinations into graphic icons, known as *emoji*. Emoticons and emoji can sometimes clarify a meaning that isn't evident from words alone (Derks et al., 2007; Lo, 2008). For example, see how each graphic below creates a different meaning for the same statement:

- You are driving me crazy
- You are driving me crazy
- You are driving me crazy

Yet the meaning of emoticons and emoji can be ambiguous (Skovholt et al., 2014). A smiley face could have a number of meanings, such as "I'm really happy," "I'm only kidding," or "I'm teasing you." Other online communication markers are also ambiguous (Vandergriff, 2013). Exclamation marks (sometimes more than one!!!) can be used at the end of sentences, or even by themselves, to denote a variety of emotional states. Ellipses (. . .) at the end of a phrase can signal displeasure, thoughtfulness, or confusion. They can also be turn-taking signals, similar to what you might convey facially or with pauses during in-person conversations. The same is true of "lexical surrogates" such as "hmmm" or "ooooh," with meanings ranging from delight to disapproval. Even clicking "Like" or "+1" has a variety of content and relational meanings (Hayes et al., 2016). The Focus on Research sidebar in this section describes the potential impact of a simple period at the end of a text message.

Not only does the content of a nonverbal message matter, but when it is sent matters as well (Ledbetter, 2008; Walther, 2009). If you've ever been upset by a friend who hasn't responded punctually to one of your texts, then you know the role that timeliness plays in mediated interpersonal communication. We talk more about the management of time later in this chapter, but here we note that it's a vital feature of online interaction (Kalman et al., 2013). It's also a good example of the principle that you cannot *not* communicate. Communicators have expectations about when others should reply to their posts, emails, and text messages, and they may perceive delays negatively.

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION IS INFLUENCED BY CULTURE AND GENDER

Cultures differ in their nonverbal languages as well as their verbal ones (Hasler et al., 2017). Fiorello La Guardia, legendary mayor of New York

FOCUS ON RESEARCH

The Power of Periods. In Texting.

It's Saturday night, and you text your friends to see if they want to get together. You get some affirmative emojis in response. Others use positive words such as "Okay," "Yeah," and "Yup" without punctuation—but a few end their one-word responses with a period: "Sure."

Does the punctuation make a difference in how you perceive the message? Based on their findings, Professor Danielle Gunraj and her colleagues would answer "Yes." The researchers showed 126 undergraduates a series of question–answer exchanges similar to the one described above. Some were framed as text messages; others as handwritten notes. When the one-word text responses were followed by a period, the students viewed them as less sincere than those without punctuation. It's worth noting that the presence of a period didn't make a difference in the handwritten exchanges, suggesting this is a phenomenon unique to texting.

Although the study was modest, it got a lot of press. Writing in *The Washington Post,* one pundit said it confirmed that "ending your texts with a period is truly monstrous. We all know this. Grammar be darned, it just doesn't look friendly" (Feltman, 2015). Linguist David Crystal declared, "The period now has an emotional charge and has become an emoticon of sorts." He believes it can be deployed to show irony, snark, and even aggression (Bilefsky, 2016).

Perhaps that's reading a lot into a tiny dot. But that's the nature of nonverbal communication: It's ambiguous, relational, and sometimes more significant than the words it accompanies.

Gunraj, D. N., Drumm-Hewitt, A. M., Dashow, E. M., Upadhyay, S. S. N., & Kline, C. M. (2016). Texting insincerely: The role of the period in text messages. *Computers in Human Behavior, 55,* 1067–1075.

from 1933 to 1945, was fluent in English, Italian, and Yiddish. Watching films of his campaign speeches with no sound, researchers found they could tell the language La Guardia was speaking based solely on the changes in his nonverbal behavior (Birdwhistell, 1970).

Some nonverbal behaviors—called **emblems**—are culturally understood substitutes for verbal expressions (Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013). Nodding the head up and down is an accepted way of saying "yes" in most cultures. Likewise, a side-to-side head shake is a nonverbal way of saying "no," and a shrug of the shoulders is commonly understood as meaning "I don't know" or "I'm not sure." Remember, however, that some emblems—such as the thumbs-up gesture—vary from one culture to another. It means "Good job!" in the United States, the number 1 in Germany, and the number 5 in Japan. Most North Americans would say the hand gesture in the photo on page 172 means "Okay." But to a Buddhist it signifies acceptance of the world as it is, and in Greece and Turkey its meaning is vulgar.

Culture also affects how nonverbal cues are monitored. In Japan, for instance, people tend to look to the eyes for emotional cues, whereas Americans and Europeans focus on the mouth (Yuki et al., 2007). These differences can be seen in the text-based emoticons used in these cultures (Park et al., 2014). American emoticons focus on mouth expressions, whereas Japanese emoticons feature the eyes (search in your web browser for "Western and Eastern emoticons" for examples).

Emblems that seem to have obvious meanings to you can have entirely different significance in other cultures. ***How can you avoid mistakes in using and interpreting nonverbal behavior when encountering people from different cultural backgrounds?***

A variety of cultural norms guide nonverbal expressiveness (Matsumoto, 2006). In some cultures, overt demonstrations of feelings such as happiness or anger are discouraged. In other cultures, the same expressions are perfectly appropriate. Thus, a Korean person might appear much more nonverbally controlled than an Italian person, when in fact their feelings might be identical. It's important to note that the *culture* in which people live is far more important than their *nationality* or *ethnicity*. For example, the facial expressions of Japanese nationals and Japanese Americans differ in ways that reflect their cultural backgrounds (Marsh et al., 2003). See Chapter 2 for more discussion of the impact of culture on nonverbal communication.

Gender also influences nonverbal communication—and with rare exceptions, differences between sexes hold true across cultures (Knapp & Hall, 2010). In general, women are more nonverbally expressive than men, and they are more accurate in interpreting others' nonverbal behavior (Hall & Andrzejewski, 2017). More specifically, research summarized by Judith Hall (2006b) shows that, compared to men, women typically

- Smile more
- Use more facial expression
- Use more (but less expansive) head, hand, and arm gestures
- Touch others more
- Stand closer to others
- Are more vocally expressive
- Make more eye contact

Despite these differences, men's and women's nonverbal communication patterns have a good deal in common (Dindia, 2006; Hall, 2006a). Moreover, male–female nonverbal differences are less pronounced in conversations between gay and lesbian participants (Knöfler & Imhof, 2007). Gender and culture certainly have an influence on nonverbal style, but the differences are often a matter of degree rather than kind.

FUNCTIONS OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Now that you understand what nonverbal communication is, we need to explore the functions it serves in relationships. As you'll read, nonverbal cues play several important roles in the way we relate with others (Ting-Toomey, 2017).

CREATING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

As you will read in Chapter 9, communication is our primary means for beginning, maintaining, and ending relationships. Nonverbal behavior plays an important role during every relational stage.

Consider the importance of nonverbal communication at the beginning of a relationship. When we first meet another person, our initial goal is to reduce our uncertainty about her or him (Berger, 1987, 2011). We ask ourselves questions such as "Would I like to know this person better?" and "Is this person interested in me?" One of the first ways we answer these questions is by observing nonverbal cues, including facial expression, eye contact, posture, gesture, and tone of voice (Berger & Kellermann, 1994). This process occurs quite rapidly—often in a matter of seconds (Zebrowitz & Montepare, 2008).

At the same time we are sizing up others, we are providing nonverbal cues about our attitude toward them. We rarely share these thoughts and feelings overtly. Imagine how odd it would be to say or hear words such as "I'm friendly and relaxed" or "You look pretty interesting, but I won't pursue this unless you give me a sign that you're interested too." Messages like these are much more safely expressed via nonverbal channels. Of course, it's important to remember that nonverbal cues are ambiguous and that you may be misinterpreting them (Mehrabian, 2008). You might want to get an outside evaluation to check your perceptions ("Is it my imagination, or is she checking me out?").

Nonverbal cues are also important in established, ongoing relationships: They both help create and signal the emotional climate. For example, nonverbal displays of affection—such as sitting close, holding hands, winking, and gazing—are strongly connected to satisfaction and commitment in romantic relationships (Horan & Booth-Butterfield, 2010). In families, nonverbal cues offer a clear sign of relational satisfaction (Rogers, 2001), and managing their meaning is vital to successful parent–child interaction (Grebelsky-Lichtman, 2014, 2015). On the job, supervisors who offer nonverbal cues of liking can increase subordinates' job motivation, job satisfaction, and affinity for their boss (Teven, 2010).

You can test the power of nonverbal behavior in relationships for yourself. First, observe the interaction of people in relationships without paying attention to their words. Watch couples or families in restaurants or other public places. Focus on the nonverbal behavior of fellow employees or professors and their students. You are likely to see a multitude of cues that suggest the quality of each relationship. Chances are good that you could make educated guesses about whether the people you're watching are satisfied with each other—and whether their relationship is beginning, being maintained, or ending.

REGULATING INTERACTION

Nonverbal **regulators** are cues that help control verbal interaction. The best example of such regulation is the wide array of turn-taking signals in everyday conversation (Wiemann & Knapp, 2008). Three signals that indicate a speaker has finished talking and is ready to yield to a listener are (1) changes in vocal intonation—a rising or falling in pitch at the end of a clause, (2) a drawl on the last syllable or the stressed syllable in a clause, and (3) a drop in vocal pitch or loudness when speaking a common expression such as "you know."

Eye contact is another way of regulating verbal communication (Bavelas et al., 2002). In conversations, the person listening typically looks more at the speaker than the reverse. When the speaker seeks a response, he or she signals by looking at the listener, creating a brief period of mutual gaze called a "gaze window." At this point, the listener is likely to respond with a nod, "uh-huh," or other reaction, after which the speaker looks away and continues speaking.

ASSESSING YOUR COMMUNICATION

Nonverbal Immediacy Behaviors

Most communication researchers agree that nonverbal immediacy—the display of involvement signaled by physical closeness, eye contact, movement, and touch—is an important ingredient of communication competence. You can measure your immediacy by completing this self-assessment. Indicate the degree to which you believe each statement applies to you on a scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 = "never" and 5 = "very often." Then ask someone who knows you well to complete the assessment, requesting that she or he be as honest as possible. When you're finished, compare notes on your conclusions.

_____ **1.** I use my hands and arms to gesture while talking to people.

_____ **2.** I use a monotone or dull voice while talking to people.

_____ **3.** I avoid eye contact while talking to people.

_____ **4.** I have a tense body position while talking to people.

_____ **5.** I am animated when I talk to people.

_____ **6.** I have a bland facial expression when I talk to people.

_____ **7.** I am stiff when I talk to people.

_____ **8.** I have a lot of vocal variety when I talk to people.

_____ **9.** I lean toward people when I talk to them.

_____ **10.** I maintain eye contact with people when I talk to them.

_____ **11.** I smile when I talk to people.

_____ **12.** I avoid touching people when I talk to them.

The 12 items are from the 26-item measure developed by Virginia Richmond and her colleagues.

Richmond, V. P., McCroskey, J. C., & Johnson, A. D. (2003). Development of the Nonverbal Immediacy Scale (NIS): Measures of self- and other-perceived nonverbal immediacy. *Communication Quarterly*, 51, 504–517.

For scoring information, see p. 193 at the end of the chapter.

INFLUENCING OTHERS

How we look, act, and sound can be more important in meeting our goals than the words we speak. The influence of nonverbal behavior comes in many forms. It can capture attention, show or increase liking, generate power, and boost credibility (Cesario & Higgins, 2008; Gifford, 2011). Sometimes deliberately and sometimes without thought, we use nonverbal behaviors in ways that get others to satisfy our wants and needs. For example, people are more willing to do our bidding—at least in the U.S.—when we look them directly in the eye (Segrin, 1993); wear high-status clothing (Bushman, 1988); use open body postures (Burgoon et al., 1990); touch them appropriately (Guéguen et al., 2010); and behave in a friendly, upbeat way (Kleman, 2008). That's why job seekers are coached to offer firm handshakes (Stewart et al., 2008) and smile often and genuinely (Krumhuber et al., 2009) to help influence employers to hire them.

INFLUENCING OURSELVES

Scholars have long known that nonverbal behavior *reflects* how a person feels. If you're happy, you smile; if you're interested, you make eye contact; if you're depressed, you slump. But a recent line of research shows the opposite can also occur—that is, if you change your nonverbal behavior, it can *affect* the way you feel. In essence, your body language influences your emotions.

Here are some of the findings:

- Adopting expansive poses such as hands on hips or spreading out your arms can increase your sense of power (Carney et al., 2010) and tolerance for pain (Bohns & Wiltermuth, 2012). Holding these postures for just two minutes creates chemical changes in the body—higher testosterone and lower cortisol.
- "Jumping for joy" is more than just an emotional reaction. The act of jumping up and down can actually trigger happiness (Shafir et al., 2013).
- Sitting up straight can improve your mood and self-esteem, and even your memory (Michalak et al., 2014; Nair et al., 2015).
- Smiling for a selfie once a day can improve your mood over time (Chen et al., 2016).

This information has practical applications. Amy Cuddy and her colleagues (2015) suggest that prior to a job interview, you can boost your confidence and create a more forceful presence by discretely holding a power pose for a minute or two. In fact, any time you're feeling nervous or low, performing the nonverbal cues of how you *want* to feel can help you "fake it 'til you make it." (See the Watch and Discuss video on this page.)

Watch and Discuss

Look up and watch Amy Cuddy's TED Talk on "Body Language."

1) Consider how *kinesics* can both reflect and affect how a person feels.

2) Discuss how you might use this information in your own life.

CONCEALING/DECEIVING

We may value and honor the truth, but many of the messages we exchange are not completely truthful. Sometimes we keep silent, sometimes we hedge, and sometimes we downright lie. As you read in Chapter 3, not

Media Clip

A Life of Deception: *The Americans*

The Jennings family seems like an embodiment of the American dream, 1980s style. Elizabeth (Keri Russell) and Philip (Matthew Rhys) run a family business and are parents of two children. They socialize easily with their suburban neighbors, including the FBI agent who lives next door.

But Elizabeth and Philip are actually KGB operatives. Raised in the USSR, they are sworn to spy on and disrupt the U.S. government. While their kids are at school or asleep, they change identities and disguises like most people change clothing.

Vital to their success as spies is the careful manipulating of their nonverbal communication. They act affectionate when they're around others, even though their arranged marriage isn't always happy. They shift accents, don wigs, and plaster on facial expressions that leave no clue to the secrets they're concealing. Monitoring their nonverbal behavior isn't just a good idea; for them, it's a matter of life and death.

all deception is self-serving or malicious; much of it is aimed at saving the "face" of the communicators involved. For example, you might pretend to have a good time at a family celebration or business event, even though you are bored senseless. In other cases, you might lie to save your own face and avoid embarrassment ("Of *course* I read the message you sent me!").

In situations such as these and many others, it's easy to see how nonverbal factors can make the face-saving deception either succeed or fail. When verbal and nonverbal messages conflict, we tend to believe the nonverbal. That's why most people monitor (and self-monitor) nonverbal cues—facial expression, eye contact, posture, vocal pitch and rate—when trying to detect or conceal deception.

Communication scholars Judee Burgoon and Tim Levine have studied deception detection for years. In their (2010) review of research on the subject, they came up with what they call "Deception Detection 101"—three findings that have been supported time and again in studies:

- We are accurate in detecting deception only slightly more than half the time—in other words, only a shade better than what we could achieve with a coin flip.
- We overestimate our abilities to detect others' lies—in other words, we're not as good at catching deception as we think we are.
- We have a strong tendency to judge others' messages as truthful—in other words, we want to believe people wouldn't lie to us (which biases our ability to detect deceit).

These principles serve as a reminder that it's not easy to determine whether someone is lying—and singular nonverbal cues aren't dead giveaways (Burgoon et al., 2015). As one writer put it, "There is no unique telltale signal for a fib. Pinocchio's nose just doesn't exist, and that makes liars difficult to spot" (Lock, 2004, p. 72). Moreover, some popular prescriptions about liars' nonverbal behaviors simply aren't accurate (Guerrero & Floyd, 2006). For instance, conventional wisdom suggests that liars avert their gaze and fidget more than non-liars. Research, however, shows

just the opposite: Liars often sustain *more* eye contact and fidget *less*, in part because they believe that to do otherwise might look deceitful (Mann et al., 2013). They also make more eye contact to help them determine if the other person believes the tales they're telling (Jundi et al., 2013).

Despite the challenges of detecting deception, there are some nonverbal clues that may reveal it (Ekman, 2009). For example, deceivers typically make more speech errors than truth-tellers: stammers, stutters, hesitations, false starts, and so on. Vocal pitch often rises when people tell lies, and liars pause longer before offering answers than do truth-tellers (Sporer & Schwandt, 2007; Vrij et al., 2000). Perhaps most significantly—because it's a physiological reaction that's not easily controlled—liars' pupils tend to dilate because of the arousal associated with fib-telling (Vrij, 2006). That's why many professional poker players wear sunglasses to hide what their eyes might reveal.

Similar to pupil dilation, the face sometimes reveals a liar's true feelings in brief, unconscious displays. Researchers call these *microexpressions* because they happen so quickly (Yan et al., 2013). Without being aware, liars may leak how they genuinely feel through brief furrows of the brow, pursing of the lips, or crinkling around the eyes (Porter et al., 2012). Microexpressions are more likely to occur during what's known as "high-stakes" lying, such as when there are severe punishments for being caught (Ekman, 2009). Keep in mind that slow-motion recordings and trained professionals are often required to pick up these microexpressions.

The bottom line is that nonverbal cues offer important information for detecting deception, but most lies aren't detected through snap judgments of a facial expression or a shift in posture. Jumping to conclusions based on limited information isn't wise communication, and it may lead to relational difficulties. Handle this material about deception detection with care and good judgment.

MANAGING IMPRESSIONS

In Chapter 3, we explained that one major goal of communicating is impression management: getting others to view us as we want to be seen. In many cases, nonverbal cues can be more important than verbal messages in creating impressions (Weisbuch et al., 2010). To appreciate how we manage impressions via nonverbal means, consider what happens when you meet strangers you would like to know better. Instead of projecting your image verbally ("Hi! I'm attractive, friendly, and easygoing"), you behave in ways that will present this identity. For example, you might dress fashionably, smile a lot, and perhaps try to strike a relaxed pose.

There are several ways of managing impressions nonverbally. Sandra Metts and Erica Grohskopf (2003) reviewed professional trade journal articles on constructing good impressions and found examples of each of the following categories:

- *Manner* refers to the way we act: how we deliberately stand and move, the way we control facial expressions, and the adjustments we make in our voice. ("Stand tall and walk proudly"; "When meeting others, make direct eye contact and use a firm but friendly handshake.")

- *Appearance* involves the way we dress, the jewelry or other artifacts we wear, hair, makeup, scents, and so on. ("Dress how you wish to be remembered: with assurance, some spark of originality, and in a way that makes you feel comfortable and confident.")
- *Setting* involves the physical items we surround ourselves with: personal belongings, vehicles, and even the place we live. ("Mat and frame awards and certificates and display them in your office.")

Outside of the business world, French psychologist Nicolas Guéguen and his colleagues (Guéguen et al., 2013) ran studies to see if small differences in setting could influence attraction. A male research confederate was asked to approach local women at a shopping center and ask for their phone numbers. When he made the request while holding a guitar case, he was successful far more times (31%) than when carrying nothing (14%) or a sports bag (9%). In another study, Guéguen (2013) had female research confederates lie face down on the beach, reading a book. Some had a (temporary) tattoo of a butterfly on their lower backs; some did not. Those bearing tattoos were approached by men for conversation more often, and more quickly, than were those without tattoos. The researchers suggest that in both studies, seemingly minor changes played major roles in nonverbal impression management.

TYPES OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

So far, we've talked about the role nonverbal communication plays in our interpersonal relationships. Now it's time to look at the many types of nonverbal communication.

BODY MOVEMENT

A primary way we communicate nonverbally is through the physical movement of our bodies: our posture, gestures, eye contact, facial expressions, and so on. Social scientists use the term **kinesics** to describe the study of how people communicate through bodily movements (Afifi, 2017). We break them down by category here, although these various features usually work in combination with each other.

Face and Eyes

The face and eyes are probably the most noticeable parts of the body. However, the nonverbal messages they send are not always the easiest to read. The face is a tremendously complicated channel of expression to interpret, for several reasons.

First, it's hard to describe the number and kind of expressions commonly produced by the face and eyes. For example, researchers have found that there are at least 8 distinguishable positions of the eyebrows and forehead, 8 more of the eyes and lids, and 10 for the lower face

(Ekman, 2003). When you multiply this complexity by the number of emotions we experience, you can see why it would be almost impossible to compile a dictionary of facial expressions and their corresponding emotions.

The significance of the face in interpersonal communication can be seen in the many phrases that allude to it. We talk about "saving face," needing some "face time," maintaining a "poker face," and "facing our fears." That's because, according to Knapp and Hall (2010), the face may well be "the primary source of communicative information next to human speech" (p. 293).

A central component of facial expression is eye behavior. **Oculesics** is the study of how the eyes can communicate. Gazes and glances are usually signals of the looker's interest. However, the *type* of interest can vary. Gazing can be an indicator of liking (Schotter et al., 2010). In other situations, eye contact indicates interest, but not attraction or approval, such as when a teacher glares at a rowdy student or a police officer "keeps an eye on" a suspect. Of course, the meaning of eye contact is influenced by culture. For instance, East Asian cultures tend to see the avoidance of eye contact as a sign of respect and prolonged eye contact as unpleasant and even aggressive (Akechi et al., 2013).

In North America, making eye contact is generally regarded favorably (Akechi et al., 2013). Those who look others in the eye are perceived as intelligent (Murphy, 2007), and experts have found a strong correlation between eye contact and interpersonal closeness (Shellenbarger, 2013). Unfortunately, those same experts lament that mobile devices interfere with eye contact. Research also suggests that overuse of technology can dull interpersonal perceptiveness. Preteens who took a five-day break from their cell phones dramatically increased their ability to accurately read others' nonverbal cues (Uhls et al., 2014). Chapters 9 and 10 will have more to say about technology and relationships, but for now it's worth noting that eye contact distractions can take a toll on interpersonal communication.

Media Clip

In a Different Voice: *Speechless*

Maya DiMeo (Minnie Driver) is a wife and mother who is fiercely protective of her family. In particular, she's an outspoken advocate for her son JJ (Micah Fowler), who has cerebral palsy and is unable to speak. He communicates primarily through a low-tech letter board and a headlight pointer—and also through nonverbal cues.

JJ's family and aides pay close attention to his eyes and face for information. Maya is quick to observe, "Oh, you don't like that?" when JJ rolls his eyes, or "You think that's funny" when he sneaks a grin. When JJ wants to communicate verbally, Maya and others read aloud the letters and words he points to on his board. But even then, he makes sure they read with the right inflection and tone, lest he be misunderstood.

The title *Speechless* is a nod to JJ's lack of talking, but the show demonstrates there's more to communication than speaking. JJ clearly has a voice—and with the help of others, he makes it heard.

Whether or not we intend it, our posture conveys a message. ***How might others interpret your characteristic postures?***

Posture and Gestures

To appreciate the communicative value of body language, stop reading for a moment and notice how you're sitting. What does your position say nonverbally about how you feel? Are there any other people near you now? What messages do you get from their present posture? By paying attention to the postures of those around you, as well as to your own, you'll find another channel of nonverbal communication that reveals how people feel about themselves and others.

The English language indicates the deep links between posture and communication. English is full of expressions that tie emotional states to body postures:

"I won't take this lying down!"
"Stand on your own two feet."
"Take a load off your back."
"Don't be so uptight!"

Phrases such as these show an awareness of posture, even if it's often unconscious. The main reason we miss most posture messages is that they are usually subtle. It's seldom that people who feel weighed down by a problem hunch over dramatically. In interpreting posture, then, the key is to look for small changes that might be shadows of the way people feel.

FOCUS ON RESEARCH

Nonverbal Imitation: The Sincerest Form of Flattery

The next time you're at a social gathering, take a look at the nonverbal behaviors in each group of conversationalists. Are most of them standing the same way—maybe with hands on hips or arms crossed? Are their postures alike? What about their facial expressions? It's likely their nonverbal displays are similar—and that's a positive sign, according to researchers Ishabel Vicaria and Leah Dickens.

The scholars conducted a meta-analysis of data about interpersonal coordination—the tendency of social partners to imitate each other's nonverbal mannerisms. They crunched numbers from 50 different studies and found some consistent conclusions.

Synchronizing nonverbal behaviors creates a social bond. It happens with people we know and love, and also between strangers. Coordinating with another's nonverbal cues reflects and creates a sense of affinity. It also reduces anxiety and enhances one's mood. The researchers conclude that nonverbal coordination is the "social glue" that promotes cohesion and harmonious feelings between interactants.

So watch for it the next time you're at a family event, out with friends, or at a business meeting. If your nonverbal behaviors match what others are doing, it's no accident. It may speak to how you feel about those people—and how they feel about you.

Vicaria, I. M., & Dickens, L. (2016). Meta-analyses of the intra- and interpersonal outcomes of interpersonal coordination. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior, 40,* 335–361.

Gestures are a fundamental element of communication—so fundamental, in fact, that people who have been blind from birth use them (Bruce et al., 2007). Gestures are sometimes intentional—for example, a cheery wave or thumbs-up. In other cases, however, our gestures are unconscious. Occasionally, an unconscious gesture will consist of an unambiguous emblem, such as a shrug that clearly means "I don't know."

Gestures can produce a wide range of reactions in receivers. In many situations, the right kinds of gestures can increase persuasiveness (Maricchiolo et al., 2009). For example, increasing hand and arm movements, leaning forward, fidgeting less, and keeping limbs open all make a speaker more effective at influencing others. Even more interesting is the finding that persuasiveness increases when one person mirrors another's movements (Van Swol, 2003). This is logical considering that nonverbal mirroring is a common way to express similarity and affiliation with others (Kouzakova et al., 2010).

As with almost any nonverbal behavior, the context in which gestures occur makes all the difference in the results they produce. Animated movements that are well received in a cooperative social setting may seem like signals of aggression or attempts at domination in a more competitive setting. Fidgeting that might suggest deviousness in a bargaining session could be appropriate when you offer a nervous apology in a personal situation. In any case, trying to manufacture insincere, artificial gestures (or any other nonverbal behaviors) will probably backfire. A more useful goal is to recognize the behaviors you find yourself spontaneously delivering and to consider how they reflect the attitudes you already feel.

TOUCH

Social scientists use the term **haptics** to distinguish the study of touching (Afifi, 2017). Research confirms the value of touch for infants (Feldman et al., 2010; Field, 2007). In particular, studies show the value of "kangaroo care" for premature babies (Feldman et al., 2014). This involves mothers holding their underdeveloped infants close to their skin for one hour a day over two weeks. Compared with babies kept exclusively in incubators, these infants had stronger physiological and cognitive development, slept better, and had lower stress levels. Moreover, the touch sessions increased the mothers' bonds with the babies and reduced their anxiety, showing that touch is important for both givers and receivers. The effects on the children in this study were still evident 10 years later. What this finding suggests is that interpersonal touch meets a primal human need.

Touch during childhood can be a powerful force in shaping the way we feel about ourselves and others. ***What messages did you receive from adult caregivers as a child? How have they affected your sense of self and relationships later in life?***

Some of the most pronounced benefits of touching occur in medicine and the health and helping professions. For example, patients are

more likely to take their medicines when physicians give a slight touch while prescribing (Guéguen & Vion, 2009). Touch between therapists and clients has the potential to encourage a variety of beneficial changes: more self-disclosure, client self-acceptance, and better client–therapist relationships (Driscoll et al., 1988). In addition, patients with dementia who were administered hand massages, along with intermittent gentle touches on the arm and shoulder, decreased their anxiety and dysfunctional behavior (Kim & Buschmann, 1999).

An additional power of touch is its on-the-job utility. Studies show that in restaurants, a server's fleeting touch of the hand or forearm of a patron can result in larger tips (Guéguen & Jacob, 2005). And a patron whom a server touches on the arm while suggesting a meal choice is more likely to choose that meal (Guéguen et al., 2007). Even athletes benefit from touch. One study of the National Basketball Association revealed that the touchiest teams had the most successful records, whereas the lowest-scoring teams touched each other the least (Kraus et al., 2010).

VOICE

To introduce you to the role your voice plays in communication, take a moment to read aloud any paragraph on this page several times, varying these factors as you do so:

- *Rate*: Read it rapidly—and then reread it verrrrryyy slowwwwly.
- *Tempo*: Emphasize *different* words, or put *in*. a few. *pauses*.
- *Volume*: Whisper the first sentence, then announce the others LOUDLY.
- *Pitch*: Read it in a high voice, then a low one—then in a midrange monotone.
- *Tone*: Say the words with attitude. Then sweetly. Then meanly.
- *Accent*: Try your hand at reading it with a regional or international lilt.

Chances are good that with each rendering, you changed how listeners would perceive you—and perhaps you even altered the meaning of the words. Social scientists use the term **paralanguage** to describe the way a message is spoken. In essence, paralanguage is not so much about *what* you say, but *how* you say it.

The impact of paralinguistic cues is strong. For example, children are drawn more to playmates who, regardless of race, have similar speech styles than they are to students of the same race who speak differently (Kinzler et al., 2009). "Accent trumps race," as the authors put it. In addition, lowering your vocal pitch can signal your intent to take charge of a situation, and people will perceive you as more powerful (Cheng et al., 2016). Toward that end, it's important to pay attention to the paralinguistic messages you're sending. When first-year medical students watched videos of themselves and rated their doctor–patient communication, some of the primary shortcomings they noticed had to do with their paralanguage—particularly tone, rate, volume, and disfluencies (Zick et al., 2007).

@work Let Your Voice Be Heard

In today's business world, it's easy to forget the value of letting clients, coworkers, and employers hear your voice—literally. Sometimes a phone call is the best way to get a job done.

Using your voice may also be a good way to get hired. In a series of experiments (Schroeder & Epley, 2015), hypothetical employers and professional recruiters watched, listened to, or read job candidates' pitches about why they should be hired. Judges who could hear the candidate's voice rated her or him as more competent, thoughtful, and intelligent. Here's what the researchers concluded:

Although text-based communication media, such as email, may provide quick and easy ways to connect with potential employers, our experiments suggest that voiceless communication comes with an unexpected inferential cost. A person's voice, it seems, carries the sound of intellect. (p. 889)

Besides boosting credibility, spoken words can save valuable time on the job. Executive Anthony Tjan (2011) sees back-and-forth e-messages as an inefficient time suck. He believes many business transactions could be conducted better via a phone conversation. And sales guru Stuart Leung (2014) says that text-based sales pitches are no replacement for the warmth and interaction that can be communicated in a voice call.

It's nice to conduct business in person, but that's not feasible in much of today's workplace. When you can't meet face to face, remember that email isn't the only means of making contact. Effective on-the-job communication may be only a phone call away.

Sarcasm is one approach in which we use emphasis, tone of voice, and length of utterance to change a statement's meaning to the opposite of its verbal message (Rockwell, 2007b). Experience this reversal yourself with the following three statements. First, say them literally; then say them sarcastically:

"You look terrific!"
"I really had a wonderful time on my blind date."
"There's nothing I like better than calves' brains on toast."

As with other nonverbal messages, people often ignore or misinterpret the vocal nuances of sarcasm. Members of certain groups—children, people with weak intellectual skills, poor listeners, people who have communication apprehension, and people with certain forms of brain damage—are more likely to misunderstand sarcastic messages than are others (Rockwell, 2007a; Shamay et al., 2002). In some cases, you'll want to give clues that your words shouldn't be taken literally. An easy way to do this in online communication is through emoticons or emoji (Thompson & Filik, 2016), or shorthand such as "j/k" or "haha." And in face-to-face conversations, sometimes you may need to clarify: "Sorry, I was being sarcastic—maybe I should have just said, 'I don't like it when you tease me in front of my friends.'"

Even pauses are part of paralanguage. Consider two types that can lead to communication snags. The first is the *unintentional pause*—those

FIGURE 6.1 A Comparison of the Ideal Speaker's Voice Types in Mexico and the United States

times when people stop to collect their thoughts before deciding how best to continue their verbal message. It's no surprise that liars tend to have more of these pauses than truth-tellers, as they often make up stories on the fly (Guerrero & Floyd, 2006). When people pause at length after being asked a delicate question ("Did you like the gift I bought you?"), it might mean they're buying time to come up with a face-saving—and perhaps less-than-honest—response. A second type of pause is the *vocalized pause*. These range from **disfluencies** such as "um," "er," and "uh" to filler words such as "like," "okay," and "ya know." Vocalized pauses reduce a person's perceived credibility (Davis et al., 2006) and should thus be avoided—especially in job interviews (Latz, 2010) and other situations where you're trying to sound poised and professional.

Just what makes a voice attractive can vary. As Figure 6.1 shows (Valentine & Saint Damian, 1988), culture can make a difference. Surveys indicate that there are both similarities and differences between what Mexicans and U.S. citizens view as the "ideal" voice. Second-language learners have a hard time learning to speak without a noticeable accent, even after years or decades of living in a new culture. And even when accented speech is perfectly understandable, it can result in discrimination by prejudiced listeners (Felps et al., 2009).

In Chapter 5, we described how shared language patterns create a sense of *convergence* among communicators. The same is true of paralanguage, as people tend to adopt the vocal patterns of their co-cultural peers (Ting-Toomey, 2017). For instance, younger Americans often use "uptalk" (statements ending with a rise in pitch) and "vocal fry" (words ending with a low guttural rumble). Celebrities such as Kim Kardashian and Zooey Deschanel popularized these vocalic styles. It's therefore not surprising that women and girls use them more than men and boys do (Linneman, 2013; Wolk et al., 2012), although age of the speaker (i.e., millennial or younger) has more of an impact than gender. There is some debate whether vocal fry diminishes one's credibility (Anderson et al., 2014) or enhances it (Yuasa, 2010). The primary point here is that communicators pick up vocal mannerisms—often unconsciously—to affiliate with their speech communities.

Pause for a moment and take a self-inventory. What feedback have you received about your paralanguage? Do people ask you to speak up or quiet down? Are you a fast or slow talker? Does your pitch signal confidence? Is your speech filled with "um"s, "like"s, and "ya know"s? Do loved ones sometimes react to your tone of voice, or critique not *what* you say but *how* you say it? Aside from qualities that result from your particular vocal cords, most features of your paralanguage are changeable. With a bit of self-monitoring, you have the ability to shift the way you talk to assist your interpersonal communication.

DISTANCE

Proxemics is the study of how communication is affected by the use, organization, and perception of space and distance (Afifi, 2017). Each of us

carries around a sort of invisible bubble of **personal space** wherever we go. We think of the area inside this bubble as our own—almost as much a part of us as our own bodies. Our personal bubbles vary in size according to the culture in which we were raised, the person we're with, and the situation. It's precisely the varying size of our personal space—the distance we put between ourselves and others—that gives a nonverbal clue to our feelings (Horan & Booth-Butterfield, 2013).

In a classic study (Crane et al., 1987) researchers tested over 100 married couples, asking partners to walk toward one another and stop when they reached a "comfortable conversational distance." Then they gave each partner a battery of tests to measure their marital intimacy, desire for change, and potential for divorce. The researchers discovered that there was a strong relationship between distance and marital happiness. The average space between distressed couples was about 25 percent greater than that between satisfied partners. On average, the happy couples stood 11.4 inches apart, whereas the distance between unhappy spouses averaged 14.8 inches.

Preferred spaces are largely a matter of cultural norms (Beaulieu, 2004; Høgh-Olesen, 2008). For example, most North Americans stand closer to each other when talking than do most Asians (Andersen & Wang, 2009). Interestingly, the influence of culture on proxemic behavior even extends to online communication. In avatar interactions, Asian dyads maintain larger distances than European dyads, consistent with what occurs in face-to-face interactions (Hasler & Friedman, 2012).

Looking at the distances that North American communicators use in everyday interaction, pioneering researcher Edward Hall (1969) found four, each of which reflects a different way we feel toward others at a given time. By "reading" which distance people select, we can get some insight into their relationship with each other.

We may become aware of the boundaries of personal space only when they are violated. ***Can you recall instances when others intruded on your personal space, or you on theirs? What were the effects?***

Intimate Distance

The first of Hall's zones, **intimate distance**, begins with skin contact and ranges out to about 18 inches. We usually use this distance with people who are emotionally close to us, and then mostly in private situations—making love, caressing, comforting, protecting. When we allow others this near to us voluntarily, it's usually a sign of trust: We've willingly lowered our defenses. On the other hand, when someone invades this most intimate area without our consent, we usually feel threatened (especially when they're "in your face").

Personal Distance

The second spatial zone, **personal distance**, ranges from 18 inches at its closest point to 4 feet at its

farthest. Its closer phase is the distance at which most couples stand in public. If someone thought to be sexually attractive stands this near one partner at a party, the other partner is likely to become alert. This "moving in" often is taken to mean that something more than casual conversation is taking place. The far range of personal distance runs from about 2.5 to 4 feet. It's the zone just beyond the other person's reach. As Hall puts it, at this distance we can keep someone "at arm's length." His choice of words suggests the type of communication that goes on at this range: The contacts are still reasonably close, but they're much less intimate than the ones that occur a foot or so closer.

Social Distance

The third zone is **social distance**, which ranges from 4 to about 12 feet out. Within this zone, the distance between communicators can have a powerful effect on how we regard and respond to others. For example, students are more satisfied with teachers who reduce (at appropriate levels, of course) the distance between themselves and their classes. They also are more satisfied with the course itself and are more likely to follow the teacher's instructions (Hackman & Walker, 1990). Likewise, medical patients are more satisfied with physicians who use close physical proximity to convey warmth and concern (Grant et al., 2000). However, people with high social anxiety are likely to keep social distance at the far reaches to reduce their discomfort with strangers (Perry et al., 2013).

Public Distance

Public distance is Hall's term for the farthest zone, running outward from 12 feet. The closer range of public distance is the one that most teachers use in the classroom. In the farther reaches of public space—25 feet and beyond—two-way communication is almost impossible. In some cases it's necessary for speakers to use public distance to reach a large audience, but we can assume that anyone who chooses to use it when more closeness is possible is not interested in a dialogue.

When our spatial bubble is invaded, we experience stress. We may respond with *barrier behaviors*, strategies designed to create a barrier (or fix a broken one) between ourselves and other people (Evans & Wener, 2007; Kanaga & Flynn, 1981). Invade someone's personal space, and notice the reaction. At first the person is most likely simply to back away, probably without realizing what is happening. Next, your partner might attempt to put an object between you, such as a desk, a chair, or some books clutched to the chest, all in an effort to get some separation. Then the other person will probably decrease eye contact (the "elevator syndrome," in which we can crowd in and even touch one another so long as we avoid eye contact). Furthermore, your reluctant partner might sneeze, cough, scratch, and exhibit any variety of behaviors to discourage your antisocial behavior. The label "antisocial" suggests you should think twice before running experiments like this. The goal here is to describe the lengths people will go to

to protect their personal space—and how most of their defense signals are nonverbal.

TERRITORIALITY

Whereas personal space is the invisible bubble we carry around, **territory** is a stationary area we claim (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001). Robert Sommer (1969) watched students in a college library and found that there's a definite pattern for people who want to study alone. Although the library was uncrowded, students almost always chose corner seats at one of the empty rectangular tables. After each table was occupied by one reader, new readers would choose a seat on the opposite side and at the far end, thus keeping the maximum distance between themselves and the other readers. One of Sommer's associates tried violating these unspoken rules by sitting next to and across from other female readers when more distant seats were available. She found that the approached women reacted defensively, signaling their discomfort through shifts in posture, gesturing, or moving away.

Consider how you would react if someone took "your" seat in one of your classes. Even though the chair isn't your possession, you probably have some sense of ownership about it (Kaya & Burgess, 2007). How you respond to perceived violations depends on *who* enters and uses your territory (a friend is less threatening than a stranger) and *why* they do so (a "mistake" is less important than a "planned attack"). It also depends on *what* territory is entered or used (you may care more about a territory over which you have exclusive rights, such as your bedroom, than about a territory in a public area, such as your seat in class).

TIME

Social scientists use the term **chronemics** to describe the study of how humans use and structure time. The use of time depends greatly on culture. Some cultures (e.g., North American, German, and Swiss) tend to be **monochronic**, emphasizing punctuality, schedules, and completing one task at a time (Flaskerud, 2013). Other cultures (e.g., South American, Mediterranean, and Arab) are more **polychronic**, with flexible schedules in which multiple tasks are pursued at the same time. One psychologist discovered the difference between North and South American attitudes when teaching at a university in Brazil (Levine, 1988). He found that some students arrived halfway through a 2-hour class and that most of them stayed put and kept asking questions when the class was scheduled to end. A half hour after the official end of the period, the professor finally closed off discussion because there was no indication that the students intended to leave.

Even within the same geographic area, different groups establish their own rules about the use of time. Consider your own experience. In school, some instructors begin and end class punctually, whereas others are more casual. With some people, you feel comfortable talking for hours in person or on the phone; with others, time seems precious and not to be "wasted."

Time can be a marker not only of status and culture but also of relationships. Research shows that the amount of time spent with a relational partner sends important messages about valuing that person (Andersen et al., 2006). In one study analyzing 20 nonverbal behaviors, "spending time together" was the most powerful predictor of both relational satisfaction and perceived interpersonal understanding (Egland et al., 1997). And as we discuss in Chapter 10, spending "quality time" with a partner is one of love's languages.

DARK SIDE OF COMMUNICATION

The Inequality of "Lookism"

What's the problem if attractive people get advantages in life? According to Rachel Gordon and her colleagues (2013), it's that "lookism" is a version of prejudice similar to racism, sexism, and classism. When people get preferential treatment based on their physical appearance, it does a disservice to everyone involved.

The researchers maintain that advantages for the attractive begin in childhood and pick up steam in adolescence. Young people who are rated as better looking get higher grades and are more likely to attain college degrees than their peers, setting the stage for better economic outcomes throughout adulthood. These outcomes include the following:

- Women gain an 8 percent wage bonus for above-average looks; they pay a 4 percent wage penalty for below-average appearance.
- For men, the attractiveness wage bonus is only 4 percent. However, the penalty for below-average looks is even higher than for women: a full 13 percent.

Deborah Rhode (2010) claims this bias for beauty is quite literally unjust, as less-than-attractive people get poorer treatment in the legal system. A starting point for change is raising awareness. It's important to realize that no one—not teachers, not clergy, not parents—is above giving preferential treatment to others on the basis of their beauty. When possible, students and job candidates should be evaluated through blind review to avoid partiality. And pay attention to how you treat people in your interactions, asking yourself the question, "Is this person's appearance affecting the way I communicate with him or her?" If you're honest, you might be surprised at how often the answer to that question is "Yes."

PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS

The importance of beauty has been emphasized in the arts for centuries. More recently, social scientists measured the degree to which physical attractiveness affects interaction between people (Lorenzo et al., 2010). Men and women whom others view as attractive are rated as being more sensitive, kind, strong, sociable, and interesting than their less fortunate brothers and sisters (Knapp & Hall, 2010). More than 200 managers in a *Newsweek* survey admitted that attractive people get preferential treatment both in hiring decisions and on the job (Bennett, 2010). And professors perceived to be "hot" are judged as having more expertise; students are more motivated to learn from them and give them higher teaching evaluations (Liu et al., 2013).

Occasionally beauty has negative effects. Interviewers may turn down highly attractive candidates if they're perceived as threats (Agthe et al., 2011). While good looks generally get rewarded, glamorous beauty can be intimidating (Frevert & Walker, 2014). And one study suggests that physically attractive people have trouble maintaining relationships, perhaps because they have high expectations for how they'll be treated by their partners (Ma-Kellams et al., 2017). On the whole, however, the interpersonal benefits of attractiveness far outweigh the downsides, as the Dark Side box on the left describes.

Fortunately, attractiveness is something we can control without having to call the plastic surgeon. If you aren't totally gorgeous or handsome, don't despair: Evidence suggests that, as we get to know more about people and like

them, we start to regard them as better looking (Albada et al., 2002). Moreover, we view others as beautiful or ugly not just on the basis of their "original equipment" but also on how they use that equipment. Posture, gestures, facial expressions, and other behaviors can increase the attractiveness of an otherwise unremarkable person. Finally, the way we dress can make a significant difference in the way others perceive us, as you'll now see.

CLOTHING

Besides protecting us from the elements, clothing is a means of nonverbal communication. It's a way for some to strategically hide "problem areas" and accentuate "assets" (Frith & Gleeson, 2008). Clothing conveys a variety of messages to others (Howlett et al., 2013), including the following:

1. Economic level
2. Education level
3. Trustworthiness
4. Social position
5. Level of sophistication
6. Economic background
7. Social background
8. Educational background
9. Level of success
10. Moral character

Dressing more formally—whether in a business suit, lab coat, or uniform—tends to enhance perceptions of credibility and expertise. Patients are more trusting of physicians who wear professional medical attire (Landry et al., 2013), and students regard guest lecturers who dress up for their presentations as more credible (Dunbar & Segrin, 2012). However, formal clothing can also create interpersonal distance. One study (Sebastian & Bristow, 2008) found that students attribute more expertise to professors who dress up, but they also rank those professors lower in likeability than casually dressed professors.

Judgments based on what a person wears, like other perceptions, need to be made carefully. For example, whereas many Americans believe a *hijab*—a "veil" or "headscarf"—functions to oppress women, veiled women see their hijab as helping them define their Muslim identity, resist sexual objectification, and be afforded more respect (Bhowon, 2016). As the cartoon on this page demonstrates, what might seem offensive to us could look extremely different to someone from another culture.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

So far this chapter has described how the nonverbal behavior of *people* influences relationships. Our last look at nonverbal communication will focus on how *things* both shape and reflect interpersonal

communication. As Barbara Brown and her colleagues put it, "relationships are inseparable from their settings" (2006, p. 673).

Physical environment can shape the kind of interaction that takes place in it. For example, a study of 10 urban neighborhoods examined the sidewalks, presence of front porches, traffic-calming devices, bars on windows, and the presence of litter or graffiti. Neighborliness was significantly higher in places with positive physical environments. In grittier locales, people were less likely to have positive interactions with those who lived near them (Wilkerson et al., 2012).

Physical items can also shape the quality of relationships. For example, exposure to business-related objects, such as a briefcase, may trigger competition; and the presence of guns in a setting may make people more aggressive (Arriaga et al., 2008). Furnishings and decorations also affect the way people feel and interact. Students who were interviewed in a room with dim lighting were more relaxed, had a more favorable impression of the interviewer, and were more self-disclosing than those exposed to bright lighting (Miwa & Hanyu, 2006). Clients who received counseling in a comfortably furnished office with upholstered chairs, curtains, a throw rug, and plants felt more welcome and expected better results than those who were treated in a sparsely furnished office with bright lighting (Nasar & Devlin, 2011).

Along with shaping communication, physical environments can reflect the relationships of the people who create them. Consider the shared space of a couple. Do they display photographs of themselves together? Do souvenirs remind them of special times? Partners who create environments that chronicle and celebrate their relationships report feeling closer to one another, having better-functioning relationships, and having higher levels of commitment (Arriaga et al., 2008).

Environmental influences can even shape perceptions and communication in virtual space. For example, people who meet online in a formal virtual setting (such as a library) communicate more formally, whereas those who meet in a casual virtual café aren't as inhibited (Peña & Blackburn, 2013).

You might want to keep these concepts in mind the next time you redesign your living space. Your physical environment—real or virtual—can affect your interpersonal communication.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Objective 6.1 Define nonverbal communication.

Nonverbal communication consists of messages expressed by nonlinguistic means. Often what we *do* conveys more meaning than what we *say*, and nonverbal communication shapes perceptions. By tuning into facial expressions, postures, gestures, vocal tones, and other behaviors, you can make assumptions about the way communicators feel about one another and get some sense about the nature of their relationship.

Q: In a public place, unobtrusively record field notes describing the nonverbal messages you observe. For each observation, record at least two assumptions about the significance of the behavior in question.

Objective 6.2 Describe the distinguishing characteristics of nonverbal communication.

Nonverbal communication is pervasive; in fact, nonverbal messages are always available as a source of information about others. Most nonverbal behavior suggests messages about relational attitudes and feelings, in contrast to verbal statements, which are better suited to expressing ideas. Messages that are communicated nonverbally are usually more ambiguous than verbal communication. Contrary to what some might think, nonverbal cues also play a role in mediated communication. Nonverbal communication is also affected by culture and gender.

Q: Keep a one-day log of significant nonverbal communication (both face-to-face and mediated) in one of your important relationships. For each entry, note (a) whether the behavior was deliberate or unintentional; (b) the relational messages that seem to have been exchanged; (c) the degree of ambiguity about the meaning of the behavior; and (d) gender and cultural factors that may have shaped the nonverbal behavior.

Objective 6.3 Identify and offer examples of the various functions that nonverbal communication can serve.

Nonverbal communication serves many functions. It can help create and maintain relationships. It also serves to regulate interaction, to influence others, and to influence yourself. In addition, nonverbal communication can be used to conceal or reveal deception. Finally, we use nonverbal cues to manage impressions with others.

Q: Using the log you created for Objective 6.2, note the functions of the nonverbal behavior in each entry.

Objective 6.4 Describe how meaning is communicated through particular nonverbal cues.

Nonverbal messages can be communicated in a variety of ways: through body movement (including the face and eyes, gestures, and posture), touch, voice, distance, territory, time, physical appearance, clothing, and environment. Culture plays a significant role in determining the rules and meanings for each of these factors.

Q: Describe one significant incident in which you communicated nonverbally through each of the channels described in this chapter.

KEY TERMS

- Chronemics (187)
- Disfluencies (184)
- Emblems (171)
- Haptics (181)
- Intimate distance (185)
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- Monochronic (187)
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- Paralanguage (182)
- Personal distance (185)
- Personal space (185)
- Polychronic (187)
- Proxemics (184)
- Public distance (186)
- Regulators (173)
- Social distance (186)
- Territory (187)

ACTIVITIES

1. Demonstrate for yourself that it is impossible to avoid communicating nonverbally by trying *not* to communicate with a friend or family member. (You be the judge of whether to tell the other person about this experiment beforehand.) See how long it takes for your partner to inquire about what is going on and to report on what he or she thinks you might be thinking and feeling.

2. Interview someone from a culture different from your own, and learn at least three ways in which nonverbal codes differ from the environment where you were raised. Together, develop a list of ways you could violate unstated but important rules about nonverbal behavior in your partner's culture in three of the following areas:

Eye contact	Voice
Posture	Touch
Gesture	Time
Facial expression	Clothing
Distance	Environmental design
Territory	Territory

Describe how failure to recognize different cultural codes could lead to misunderstandings, frustrations, and dissatisfaction. Discuss how awareness of cultural rules can be developed in an increasingly multicultural world.

3. Watch a television program or film, and identify examples of the following nonverbal functions:

Creating and maintaining relationships
Regulating interaction
Influencing others or self
Concealing or deceiving
Managing impressions
If time allows, show these examples to your classmates.

4. Learn more about the nonverbal messages you send by interviewing someone who knows you well: a friend, family member, or coworker. Ask your interview participant to describe how he or she knows when you are feeling each of the following emotions, even though you may not announce your feelings verbally:

Anger or irritation
Boredom or indifference
Happiness
Sadness
Worry or anxiety

Which of these nonverbal behaviors do you display intentionally, and which are not conscious? Which functions do your nonverbal behaviors perform in the situations your partner described: creating/maintaining relationships, regulating interaction, influencing others, concealing/deceiving, and/or managing impressions?

5. Explore your territoriality by listing the spaces you feel you "own," such as your parking space, parts of the place you live, and seats in a particular classroom. Describe how you feel when your territory is invaded, and identify things you do to "mark" it. Share your findings with a group of classmates and see if they have similar or different territoriality habits.

6. This activity requires you to observe how people use space in a particular setting and to note reactions to violations of spatial expectations. Select a supermarket, department store, college bookstore, or some other common setting in which people shop for things and then pay for them on a checkout line. Observe the interaction distances that seem usual between salesclerks and customers, between customers as they shop, and between customers in the checkout line.

a. What are the average distances between the people you observed?

b. How do people respond when one person comes too close to another or when one person touches another? How do people react to these violations of their space? How could they avoid violating each other's personal space?

c. Try to observe people from a culture other than your own in this store. Describe their use of spatial distance. If this is not possible in the store, think back to a foreign film or a film that contains interaction between North Americans and people of another culture, as well as people from that same culture.

SCORING FOR ASSESSING YOUR COMMUNICATION (PAGE 174)

Step 1. Reverse-score items 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 12 (i.e., 5 = 1, 4 = 2, 3 = 3, 2 = 4, and 1 = 5).

Step 2. After reverse-scoring the 6 items in step 1, sum the scores for all 12 items. This is your Nonverbal Immediacy Scale score.

Scores can range from 12 to 60. Men and women differed in their self-evaluations using this measure, with women perceiving themselves as engaging in more nonverbal immediacy behaviors than men. College-age women had an average score of 47, with most scores between 42 and 52. College-age men had an average score of 43, with most scores between 38 and 49.

7

Listening: Receiving and Responding

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

7.1 Describe the nature of listening and the listening styles that interpersonal communicators use.

7.2 Explain the challenges that can impede effective listening.

7.3 Identify the five components of the interpersonal listening process.

7.4 Effectively use a variety of reflective and directive listening responses.

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TAKE A MOMENT to identify the worst listener you know. Maybe it's someone who interrupts or whose attention seems to wander as you talk. Perhaps this person forgets important things you have said, steers the conversation back to himself or herself, or gives responses that reflect a lack of understanding. Recall how you feel when you're conversing with this poor listener. Irritated? Frustrated? Discouraged?

Now think about how others view *you* as a listener. Which of these behaviors, so annoying in your conversational partners, do you engage in yourself?

In this chapter, you will learn just how important listening is in interpersonal communication. You will read about the many factors that make good listening difficult and find reasons for tackling those challenges. You will learn what really happens when listening takes place. Finally, you will read about a variety of listening responses that you can use to increase your own understanding, improve your relationships, and help others.

THE NATURE OF LISTENING

Plenty of people offer advice on how to listen better, such as "close your mouth and open your ears." Although such prescriptions are a good start, they are overly simplistic and don't capture the complex nature of listening. We begin our exploration of this subject by describing the importance of listening in interpersonal communication.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING

How important is listening? In terms of frequency, it ranks first among communication activities. Surveys (Barker et al., 1981; Emanuel et al., 2008) show that as much as 55 percent of college students' communication time is spent listening (see Figure 7.1). When working adults were asked to name the most common communication behavior they observed in their place of business, "listening" topped the list (Keyton et al., 2013). And as the At Work box on page 197 attests, listening skills are highly valued in the workplace.

The business world is not the only setting in which listening is vital. When a group of adults was asked to rank various communication skills according to their importance, listening topped the family/social list as well as the career list (Brownell & Wolvin, 2010). In committed relationships, listening to personal information in everyday conversations is considered an important ingredient of satisfaction (Prager & Buhrmester, 1998). With this in mind, we turn our attention to defining this important skill.

FIGURE 7.1 Time Devoted to Communication Activities

@work Listening on the Job

If you were asked to imagine the most talented communicators in the business world, it's likely you would picture executives who are articulate, charismatic public figures. However, research shows that in the workplace, the ability to listen effectively is more important than public presentation skills.

Numerous studies (summarized in Flynn et al., 2008) find listening to be the most important communication skill for entry-level workers, subordinates, supervisors, and managers on several dimensions: job and career success, productivity, upward mobility, communication training, and organizational effectiveness. Moreover, people who work in organizations that value listening to their employees have a stronger sense of attachment and loyalty to their companies (Reed et al., 2016).

Unfortunately, there's no connection between how well most communicators *think* they listen and how competent they really are in their ability to understand others. In a classic study (Brownell, 1990), a group of managers were asked to rate their listening skills. Astonishingly, not one of the managers described himself or herself as a "poor" or "very poor" listener, and 94 percent rated themselves as "good" or "very good." The favorable self-ratings contrasted sharply with the perceptions of the managers' subordinates, many of whom said their bosses' listening skills were weak.

Leadership coach Melissa Daimler (2016) believes the best managers are the best listeners. She's a fan of the question "What do you think?" as a tool for drawing out valuable information. "It can be a powerful technique, especially if there is no single right answer," she notes. But it works best "in an organization that values listening."

LISTENING DEFINED

So far we have used the term *listening* as if it needs no explanation. Actually, there's more to this concept than you might suspect. We define **listening**—at least the interpersonal type—as the process of receiving and responding to others' messages.

Traditional approaches to listening focus on the reception of *spoken* messages. However, we've broadened the definition to include messages of all sorts because much of contemporary listening takes place through mediated channels, some of which involve the written word. Consider times you've said something like, "I was talking with a friend and she *said* . . . ," when the conversation you recount actually took place via text messaging. You'll read in Chapter 9 how social support can be offered in face-to-face communication but also through blogs, posts, tweets, and other social media mechanisms. We continue to focus on spoken messages in this chapter (beginning with our discussion of "hearing"), but recognize that "listening" in contemporary society involves more than meets the ear.

"You're not listening to what you're hearing."

Hearing Versus Listening

Listening and hearing aren't identical. **Hearing** is the process in which sound waves strike the eardrum and cause vibrations that are transmitted to the brain. Listening occurs when the brain reconstructs these electrochemical impulses into a representation of the original sound and then gives them meaning (Robinshaw, 2007). Barring illness, injury, or cotton plugs, you can't stop hearing. Your ears will pick up sound waves and transmit them to your brain whether you want them to or not.

Listening, however, isn't automatic. Many times we hear but do not listen. Sometimes we automatically and unconsciously block out irritating sounds, such as a neighbor's lawn mower or the roar of nearby traffic. We also stop listening when we find a subject unimportant or uninteresting. Boring stories, television commercials, and nagging complaints are common examples of messages we may tune out.

Mindless Listening

When we move beyond hearing and start to listen, researchers note that we process information in two very different ways (Burleson, 2011; Todorov et al., 2002). Ellen Langer (1990) uses the terms *mindless* and *mindful* to describe these different ways of listening. **Mindless listening** occurs when we react to others' messages automatically and routinely, without much mental investment. Words such as "superficial" and "cursory" describe mindless listening better than terms such as "ponder" and "contemplate."

Although the term *mindless* may sound negative, this sort of low-level information processing is a potentially valuable type of communication. It frees us to focus our minds on messages that require our careful attention (Burgoon et al., 2000). Given the number of messages to which we're exposed, it's impractical to listen carefully and thoughtfully 100 percent of the time. It's unrealistic to devote your full attention to long-winded stories, idle chatter, or remarks you've heard many times before. The only realistic way to manage the onslaught of messages is to be "lazy" toward many of them (Griffin, 2006). In situations like these, we forgo careful analysis and fall back on the schemas—and sometimes the stereotypes—described in Chapter 4 to make sense of a message. If you stop right now and recall the messages you have heard today, it's likely that you processed most of them mindlessly.

FIGURE 7.2 The Chinese characters that make up the verb "to listen."

Mindful Listening

By contrast, **mindful listening** involves giving careful and thoughtful attention and responses to the messages we receive. You tend to listen mindfully when a message is important to you or to someone you care about. Think of how you would tune in carefully if a close friend told you about the loss of a loved one. In situations like this, you want to give the message-sender your complete and undivided attention (see Figure 7.2).

Sometimes we respond mindlessly to information that deserves—and even demands—our mindful

attention. Ellen Langer's (1990) determination to study mindfulness began when her grandmother complained about headaches coming from a "snake crawling around" beneath her skull. Doctors quickly diagnosed the problem as senility, interpreting the snake description as nonsense. In fact, the grandmother had a brain tumor that eventually killed her. The event made a deep impression on Langer:

> For years afterward I kept thinking about the doctors' reactions to my grandmother's complaints, and about our reactions to the doctors. They went through the motions of diagnosis, but were not open to what they were hearing. Mindsets about senility interfered. We did not question the doctors; mindsets about experts interfered. (p. 3)

Most of our daily decisions about whether to listen mindfully don't have life-and-death consequences, of course. Yet we often need to listen consciously and carefully to what others are telling us. That kind of mindful listening is the focus of this chapter.

LISTENING STYLES

Not everyone listens the same way or with the same goals all the time. Communication researchers have identified four broad listening styles—task oriented, relational, analytical, and critical—each of which has both strengths and weaknesses (Bodie et al., 2013). Many people use more than one listening style, and the style may vary depending on the situation at hand (Gearhart et al., 2014).

Task-Oriented Listening

Task-oriented listening is most concerned with efficiency and accomplishing the job at hand. When deadlines and other pressures demand immediate action, task orientation can be beneficial. It's most appropriate when the primary focus is taking care of business; such listeners encourage others to be organized and concise.

Despite its advantages, a task orientation may alienate others when it seems to ignore their feelings. People with a different temperament, or those who are from cultures where it is impolite to be direct, may not appreciate a strictly task-oriented approach. In addition, a focus on getting things done quickly may come at the expense of thoughtful deliberation and consideration. Finally, task-oriented listeners may minimize the emotional issues and concerns that are so important to many business and personal transactions.

Relational Listening

Relational listening is most concerned with building emotional closeness with others. People who primarily use this style are typically extroverted, attentive, and friendly (Villaume & Bodie, 2007). Relational listeners aim to understand how others feel; they are thus aware of and highly responsive to others' emotions. They strive to be nonjudgmental and are more interested in understanding and supporting people than in evaluating or controlling them. Not surprisingly, relational listeners are more likely than those with other styles to draw out responses from the message-sender (Keaton et al., 2015).

ASSESSING YOUR COMMUNICATION

Your Listening Styles

Record your first impression to each of the following statements by indicating the degree to which you agree or disagree. Use a scale ranging from 1 to 7, where 1 = "strongly disagree" and 7 = "strongly agree."

Relational Listening

_____ **1.** When listening to others, it is important to understand the feelings of the speaker.

_____ **2.** I listen to understand the emotions and mood of the speaker.

_____ **3.** I listen primarily to build and maintain relationships with others.

_____ **4.** I enjoy listening to others because it allows me to connect with them.

Analytical Listening

_____ **5.** I tend to withhold judgment about another's ideas until I have heard everything they have to say.

_____ **6.** When listening to others, I consider all sides of the issue before responding.

_____ **7.** I fully listen to what a person has to say before forming any opinions.

_____ **8.** To be fair to others, I fully listen to what they have to say before making judgments.

Task Listening

_____ **9.** I get frustrated when people get off topic during a conversation.

_____ **10.** I prefer speakers who quickly get to the point.

_____ **11.** I find it difficult to listen to people who take too long to get their ideas across.

_____ **12.** When listening to others, I appreciate speakers who give brief, to-the-point presentations.

Critical Listening

_____ **13.** I often catch errors in other speakers' logic.

_____ **14.** I tend to naturally notice errors in what other speakers say.

_____ **15.** I have a talent for catching inconsistencies in what a speaker says.

_____ **16.** When listening to others, I notice contradictions in what they say.

This measure presents 16 of the 24 items of the original instrument developed by Graham Bodie and his colleagues: Bodie, G. D., Worthington, D. L., & Gearhart, C. C. (2013). The Listening Styles Profile–Revised (LSP–R): A scale revision and evidence for validity. *Communication Quarterly, 61,* 72–90.

For scoring information, see page 225 at the end of the chapter.

A relational orientation can have drawbacks, however. In an effort to be congenial and supportive, relational listeners may lose their detachment and ability to objectively assess information (Gearhart & Bodie, 2011). Less relationally oriented communicators may view them as overly expressive and even intrusive.

Analytical Listening

Analytical listening emphasizes attending to the full message before coming to judgment. People who default to this style want to hear details and analyze an issue from a variety of perspectives. Analytical listeners can be a big help when the goal is to investigate difficult questions, taking into account a wide range of perspectives. They are especially valuable in thinking systematically about complex issues. This thorough approach can be time consuming and impractical at times, however, such as when a deadline is fast approaching.

Critical Listening

People whose default mode is **critical listening** have a strong desire to evaluate messages. They are concerned not just with understanding messages but with assessing their quality, focusing on accuracy and consistency. This style can be especially helpful when the goal is to investigate a problem. However, critical listeners can also frustrate others by appearing to find fault in even minor details.

Whichever styles you use, it's important to recognize that you can control the way you listen. When your relationship with the speaker needs attention, adopt a relational approach. If investigation is called for, put on your analytical persona. And when there is a need for evaluation, become a critical listener. You can also become more effective by assessing and adapting to the listening preferences and styles of your conversational partners.

Media Clip

Multifaceted Listening: *The Profit*

Marcus Lemonis is a billionaire who adds to his wealth by investing in ailing companies. The TV series *The Profit* chronicles his approach. (The show's title is a play on words, as Lemonis needs to be a prophet to make a profit.)

When he first analyzes a business, Lemonis relies on analytical, critical, and task-oriented listening. He asks all stakeholders to explain how they went from making to losing money. Based on what he learns, Lemonis devises a strategy for turning around the business.

Along with focusing on the nuts and bolts of a company, Lemonis recognizes that business problems create interpersonal problems, and vice versa. To understand how interpersonal dynamics affect the bottom line, he engages in heavy doses of relational listening. In the end, Lemonis helps manage hurt feelings and breaches of trust as much as he assists in balancing ledgers.

The show is a reminder that good communicators use a variety of listening styles and responses—and that many business problems require interpersonal solutions.

THE CHALLENGE OF LISTENING

Even with the best intentions, listening carefully is a challenge. When two or more people are listening to a speaker, we tend to assume that each understands the same message. But recall our discussion of perception in Chapter 4; many factors cause each of us to perceive an event differently. Physiological factors, social roles, cultural background, personal interests, and needs all shape and distort the raw data we hear into very different messages. It's no wonder that dyads typically achieve only 25 to 50 percent accuracy in interpreting or representing each other's behavior (Spitzberg, 1994). Our unique views of the world both color and limit the way we listen (Robins et al., 2004).

Although we all listen differently, we can try to avoid some common pitfalls. Here we take a look at some of the obstacles and bad habits we need to overcome in order to listen carefully.

RECOGNIZING BARRIERS TO LISTENING

Listening is more difficult than many realize. Common barriers to listening include information overload, personal concerns, rapid thought, and noise. Being aware of these potential barriers can help you create environments that are more conducive to listening.

Information Overload

The sheer amount of information most of us encounter every day makes it impossible to listen carefully to everything we hear. We're bombarded with messages not only in face-to-face interaction, but also from the internet, the media, cell phones, and various other sources (Arsenault, 2007). Given this barrage of information, it's virtually impossible for us to keep our attention totally focused for long. As a result, we often choose—understandably and sometimes wisely—to listen mindlessly rather than mindfully.

Because listening well is difficult, the gift of attention is both rare and meaningful. ***What factors make it difficult for you to listen carefully and skillfully? How can you overcome these barriers when it's important to be a good listener?***

Personal Concerns

A second reason we don't always listen carefully is that we're often wrapped up in personal concerns of more immediate importance to us than the messages others are sending (Golen, 1990; Nichols, 2009). It's hard to pay attention to someone else when you're anticipating an upcoming test or thinking about the wonderful time you had last night. When we still feel that we have to pay attention to others while our focus is elsewhere, listening becomes mindless at best and often a polite charade.

Rapid Thought

Careful listening is also difficult because our minds are so active. Although we're capable of

understanding speech at rates up to 600 words per minute (Versfeld & Dreschler, 2002), the average person speaks much more slowly—between 100 and 140 words per minute. Therefore, we have a lot of "spare time" to spend with our minds while someone is talking. The temptation is to use this time in ways that don't relate to the speaker's ideas, such as thinking about personal interests, daydreaming, planning a rebuttal, and so on. The trick is to use this spare time to understand the speaker's ideas better rather than let your attention wander.

Noise

Finally, our physical and mental worlds often present distractions that make it hard for us to pay attention. The sounds of other conversations, traffic, and music, as well as the kinds of psychological noise discussed in Chapter 1, all interfere with our ability to listen well. In addition, fatigue or other forms of discomfort can distract us from paying attention to a speaker's remarks. For instance, consider how you listen less effectively when you are seated in a crowded, hot, stuffy room full of moving people and other noises. In such circumstances, even the best intentions aren't enough to ensure understanding.

AVOIDING POOR LISTENING HABITS

Most people possess one or more habits that keep them from understanding others' messages. As you read the following list of such habits, see which ones describe you. Avoiding these poor listening behaviors begins with awareness of when you engage in them.

by Rob DenBleyker, © Explosm 2017

- *Pseudolistening* is pretending to pay attention. Pseudolisteners look others in the eye, and they may even nod and smile, but their minds are in another world.
- *Stage hogging* is expressing your own ideas without inviting others to share theirs. Stage hogs allow others to speak from time to time, but only so they can catch their breath; they do not seem to care what others may contribute to the conversation.
- *Selective listening* is responding only to the parts of a speaker's remarks that interest you, ignoring or rejecting everything else.
- *Filling in gaps* is manufacturing information that wasn't part of an original story or message. When people who fill in gaps retell what they listened to, they present a distorted (not merely incomplete) version of the original.
- *Insulated listening* is almost the opposite of selective listening. Instead of focusing only on topics of interest, these listeners tune out any topics they'd rather not deal with.
- *Defensive listening* is taking innocent comments as personal attacks. Defensive listeners project their own insecurities onto others.
- *Ambushing* is listening carefully only to collect information for use in attacking the speaker. This kind of strategy can ruin a supportive communication climate.

COMPONENTS OF LISTENING

By now, you can begin to see that there is more to listening than sitting quietly while another person speaks. In truth, listening—especially *mindful* listening—consists of five separate elements: hearing, attending, understanding, remembering, and responding.

HEARING

As we have discussed, hearing is the physiological aspect of listening. It is obviously vital to listening because it's the starting point of the process. It can be diminished by physiological disorders, background noise, or auditory fatigue, which is a temporary loss of hearing caused by continuous exposure to the same tone or loudness. People who attend a loud concert or fireworks show may experience auditory fatigue and, if they are exposed often enough, permanent hearing loss ("5.2 Million Young Americans," 2001). And what used to be perceived as a problem just for the elderly is now a serious concern for adolescents, due in large part to the use of earphones for portable devices (Shargorodsky et al., 2010). It's wise to protect your hearing—for your own sake as well as for the sake of your relationship partners.

ATTENDING

Whereas hearing is a physiological process, **attending** is a psychological one, and it is part of the process of selection that we described in Chapter 4. As discussed earlier in this chapter, we are awash in messages from both social and mass media. This deluge of communication has made the challenge of attending tougher than at any time in human history

(Hansen, 2007; Ralph et al., 2013). And despite what many believe, we can't attend to multiple sources at the same time—at least not well (see the Dark Side box in this section).

We would go crazy if we attended to every message, so we filter out some while focusing on others. Not surprisingly, we attend most carefully to messages when there's a payoff for doing so (Burleson, 2007). If you're planning to see a movie, you'll listen to a friend's description of it more closely than you otherwise would. And when you want to get to know others better, you'll pay careful attention to almost anything they say in hopes of advancing the relationship.

As you read in Chapter 6, skillful communicators attend to both speakers' words and their nonverbal cues. Imagine you asked a friend, "How's it going?" and she answered, "Fine." Her nonverbal behaviors could either reinforce the statement (big smile, enthusiastic vocal tone) or contract it (downcast eyes, slumped posture, dejected vocal tone). Some people are simply inattentive to nonverbal cues, but others suffer from a physiological syndrome called nonverbal learning disorder (Casey, 2012). Due to a processing deficit in the right hemisphere of the brain, people with this disorder have trouble making sense of many nonverbal cues. Whether due to insensitivity or physiology, failing to attend to nonverbal cues is a listening deficit.

UNDERSTANDING

Paying attention—even close attention—to a message doesn't guarantee that you'll understand what's being said. **Understanding** is attaching meaning to a message. This stage of the listening process is composed of several elements. First, of course, you must be aware of the syntactic and grammatical rules of the language. You must also be familiar with the speaker's vocabulary and jargon (you can probably remember times when you felt lost in the lingo and acronyms at a new job). Another important factor is

DARK SIDE OF COMMUNICATION
The Myth of Multitasking

"Don't worry—I'm still listening" (while answering a text message)
"I'm paying attention to you" (while Googling)
"It's okay—I can multitask" (while perusing social media)

You've probably heard—or spoken—words like these while talking with friends and family. Most people are convinced they can attend to several message sources at once. In fact, they believe multitasking is an efficient and effective way to communicate.

Unfortunately, research doesn't back their claim. Our brains can only process so much information at one time, and mobile devices provide a distraction that impairs cognitive focus (Carrier et al., 2015). Studies show that media multitasking has a negative effect on learning (Kuznekoff et al., 2015), studying (David et al., 2015), and remembering (Uncapher et al., 2016). One review of the literature put it this way: "Research provides clear evidence that mobile media use is distracting, with consequences for safety, efficiency, and learning" (Levine et al., 2012, p. 15). Safety concerns are the darkest side of multitasking, as texting while driving kills thousands each year (O'Connor et al., 2013). (For info on persuading friends to stop texting while behind the wheel, see Wang, 2016.)

The relationship between mobile devices and distraction is so strong that the mere *presence* of a cell phone can disrupt your listening, according to one study (Thornton et al., 2014). The sight of a mobile device reminds you of the "broader social community" you're missing out on, says Bill Thornton, the study's lead author. "With the presence of the phone, you're wondering what those people are doing." He recommends putting your phone out of sight when not using it: "Unless you're an advisor to the president and we have a national emergency, you can wait an hour to get a text" (Worland, 2014).

Face-to-face communication is becoming increasingly rare, so it's wise to treat it as a valuable commodity. When you're with another person, lend them more than just your ear—give them your full and undivided attention.

what you know about the message's source. Such background will help you decide, for example, whether a friend's insulting remark is a joke or a serious attack. The context of a message also helps you understand what's being said. A yawning response to your comments would probably have a different meaning at midnight than at noon.

The ideal in interpersonal listening is both to understand and to be understood. **Listening fidelity** is the degree of congruence between what a listener understands and what the message sender was attempting to communicate (Powers &Witt, 2008). Fidelity doesn't mean agreement. You might listen carefully to a point your friend is making, understand her position quite clearly, and still disagree completely. But the act of understanding sends a positive relational message, even if the communicators don't see eye to eye on the content.

REMEMBERING

The ability to recall information once we've understood it, or **remembering**, is a function of several factors. These include the number of times the information is heard or repeated, the amount of information received at once, and whether presenting the information can be rehearsed (Ranpura, 2013).

Early research on listening revealed that people remember only about half of what they hear immediately after hearing it, even when they listen mindfully (Barker, 1971). Within 2 months, we forget 50 percent of the originally remembered portion, bringing what we remember down to about 25 percent of the original message. However, this loss doesn't take 2 months; people start forgetting immediately (within 8 hours, the 50% remembered drops to about 35%). Of course, these amounts vary from person to person and depend on the importance of the information being recalled (Cowan & AuBuchon, 2008).

Forgetting important messages can cause relational problems. People often feel slighted when others—especially loved ones—don't remember things they've heard. "I told you this repeatedly and you still forgot?" is a familiar refrain in many interpersonal conflicts.

RESPONDING

All the steps we have discussed so far—hearing, attending, understanding, and remembering—are internal activities. A final part of the listening process involves **responding** to a message—giving observable feedback (Reis & Clark, 2013). In initial interactions, people generally appreciate listeners who respond by asking questions or paraphrasing (Weger et al., 2014). Nonverbal responsiveness is important, too. One study found that when physicians offered plenty of supportive nonverbal cues—eye contact, nodding, smiling, gesturing, leaning forward—their patients responded with clearer descriptions of symptoms, leading to more accurate diagnoses (Ruben & Hall, 2016). In other words, responsive listening helps both senders and receivers communicate more effectively. (The Focus on Research sidebar on p. 207 offers further evidence for this point.)

FOCUS ON RESEARCH

Responding Helps Speakers Tell Their Stories

It can be frustrating to tell someone a personal problem, only to have them give you little, if any, response. When you don't get a reaction, you're likely to say (or at least think), "Did you hear what I just told you?"

A team led by Graham Bodie found support for the notion that we appreciate responsive listeners in times of trouble. The researchers asked undergraduates to disclose a recent upsetting problem. Some of the students described their woes to trained listeners, while others opened up to untrained respondents. The trained listeners were coached to use the response skills described in this chapter: questioning, paraphrasing, and empathizing (referred to collectively as "active listening"). Not surprisingly, the problem disclosers said the trained listeners seemed more emotionally aware than the untrained ones. They also said their emotional states improved from talking with active, responsive listeners.

The researchers noted that when the problem disclosers didn't get active listening responses from their partners, they had trouble telling their stories. The conversations didn't flow smoothly, and the disclosers were more likely to repeat themselves—perhaps because they thought they weren't getting through. These findings offer further evidence that effective listening is an active, not a passive process.

Bodie, G. D., Vickery, A. J., Cannava, K., & Jones, S. M. (2015). The role of "active listening" in informal helping conversations: Impact on perceptions of listener helpfulness, sensitivity, and supportiveness and discloser emotional improvement. *Western Journal of Communication, 79*, 151–17

Adding responsiveness to our listening model demonstrates a fact we discussed in Chapter 1: that communication is transactional in nature. Listening isn't just a passive activity. As listeners, we are active participants in a communication transaction, sending and receiving messages simultaneously.

TYPES OF LISTENING RESPONSES

Of the five components of listening described in the preceding section, it's responding that lets us know if others are truly tuned in to what we're saying (Maisel et al., 2008). Think for a moment of someone you consider a good listener. Why did you choose that person? It's probably because of the way she or he behaves while you are speaking.

Participants in one study said they expect listeners to be attentive, understanding, friendly, responsive, and able to maintain a conversational flow (Bodie et al., 2012). What behaviors mark those characteristics? Good listeners

- ask and answer questions;
- provide reflective and relevant feedback;
- offer their own perspective; and
- respond nonverbally by making eye contact, nodding their heads, and leaning forward.

FIGURE 7.3 Types of Listening Responses

In other words, although listening begins as an internal mental process, others will determine whether and how you're listening by monitoring your responses.

As Figure 7.3 illustrates, listening responses range from *reflective* feedback, which invites the speaker to talk without concern of evaluation, to more *directive* responses, which evaluate the speaker's messages. The primary goals of reflective feedback are to understand, confirm, and mirror what the speaker said. By contrast, the primary goals of directive feedback are to judge the speaker's message and provide guidance. We spend the remainder of the chapter looking at when and how to use each response style along this spectrum. Each one is an important component of your listening toolkit.

SILENT LISTENING

There are times when the best response is to say nothing, such as when you don't want to encourage a speaker to keep talking. If a boss or instructor is droning on, and you need to leave for an appointment, you might not want to keep the conversation going. Or maybe a friend is retelling the story of a horrible date for what seems like the 10th time. **Silent listening** allows you to stay attentive and nonverbally responsive without offering any verbal feedback.

This isn't just an avoidance strategy. Silent listening also can be the right approach when you are open to the other person's ideas but your interjections wouldn't be appropriate. For instance, rather than interrupting a friend's joke to ask for clarification, it might be more considerate to wait for the punch line.

There are even times when silent listening can help others solve their problems. Sonia Johnson (1987; see also Smith, 2010) describes a powerful activity she calls "hearing into being." The process is simple: In brainstorming sessions, each participant has totally uninterrupted floor time. "When we are free to talk without threat of interruption, evaluation, and the pressure of time," notes Johnson, "we move quickly past known territory out into the frontiers of our thought" (p. 132). Johnson, who uses the technique in feminist seminars, reports that some women cry when they first experience it because they are not used to being listened to so seriously and completely.

When was the last time you talked, uninterrupted, to an attentive partner for more than a few minutes? How would you like the chance to develop your ideas without pausing for another's comments? Silent listening is a response style that many of us could profit from using—and receiving—more often.

QUESTIONING

Regarded as "the most popular piece of language" (Goodman & Esterly, 1990), **questioning** is asking for additional information. There are several reasons to ask sincere, nondirective questions:

- *To clarify meanings.* Good listeners don't assume they know what their partners mean; they ask for clarification with questions such as these: "What did you mean when you said he was being 'unfair'?" "You said she's 'religious'—how do you define that term?" "You said you were going 'fast'—just how fast were you going?" Of course, be sure to use an appropriate tone of voice when asking such questions, or they might sound like an inquisition (Tracy, 2002).
- *To learn about others' thoughts, feelings, and wants.* A sincere, sensitive, and caring question can draw out opinions, emotions, needs, and hopes. "What do you think about the new plan?" and "How did you feel when you heard the news?" are examples of such probes. When inquiring about personal information, it is usually best to ask **open questions**, which allow a variety of extended responses, rather than **closed questions**, which allow only a limited range of answers. For instance, "How did you feel?" is an open question that allows a variety of responses, whereas "Did you feel angry?" is a closed question that requires only a yes-or-no answer (and may direct respondents toward feelings they weren't experiencing).
- *To encourage elaboration.* People are sometimes hesitant to talk about themselves, or perhaps they aren't sure if others are interested. Remarks such as "Tell me more about that," "I'm not sure I understand," and "I'm following you" convey concern and involvement. Notice that none of these examples end with a question mark. We can encourage elaboration simply by acknowledging that we are listening.
- *To encourage discovery.* Asking questions can sometimes encourage others to explore their thoughts and feelings. "So, what do you see as your options?" may prompt an employee to come up with creative problem-solving alternatives. "What would be your ideal solution?" might help a friend get in touch with various wants and needs. Most important, encouraging discovery rather than dispensing advice indicates you have faith in others' ability to think for themselves. This may be the most important message that you can communicate as an effective listener.
- *To gather more facts and details.* People often appreciate listeners who want to learn more, as long as the questions aren't intrusive. Questions such as "What did you do then?" and "What did she say

after that?" can help a listener understand the big picture. One study found that teachers who ask questions in parent–teacher conversations before launching into problem solving are perceived as more effective communicators (Castro et al., 2013).

Not all questions are genuine requests for information. Whereas **sincere questions** are aimed at understanding others, **counterfeit questions** are really disguised attempts to send a message, not receive one. As such, they fit better at the "more directive" end of the listening response continuum pictured in Figure 7.3 on page 208. It's also likely that they'll lead to a defensive communication climate, as we discuss in Chapter 11.

Counterfeit questions come in several varieties:

- *Questions that trap the speaker.* Asking "You didn't like that movie, did you?," backs the respondent into a corner. By contrast, "What did you think of the movie?" is a sincere question that is easier to answer. Tag endings such as "Did you?" or "Isn't that right?" can indicate that the asker is looking for agreement, not information. Although some listeners use these tag endings in sincere questions to confirm and facilitate understanding (Coates, 1986), others use tags to coerce agreement or to accuse: "You said you'd call at five o'clock, but you forgot, didn't you?" Similarly, questions that begin with "Don't you" (such as "Don't you think she would make a good boss?") direct others toward a desired response. As a simple solution, changing "Don't you?" to "Do you?" makes the question less leading.
- *Questions that make statements.* "Are you *finally* ready?" is more of a statement than a question—a fact unlikely to be lost on the targeted person. Emphasizing certain words also can turn a question into a statement: "You lent money to *Tony*?" We also use questions to offer advice. The person who asks, "Are you going to stand up to him and give him what he deserves?" has clearly stated an opinion about what should be done.
- *Questions that carry hidden agendas.* "Are you busy Friday night?" is a dangerous question to answer. If you say "No," thinking the person has something fun in mind, you won't like hearing "Good, because I need some help moving my piano." Obviously, such questions are not designed to enhance understanding; they are setups for the proposal that follows. Other examples include "Will you do me a favor?" and "If I tell you what happened, will you promise not to get mad?" Because they are strategic rather than spontaneous, these questions are likely to provoke defensiveness (see Chapter 11). Wise communicators answer questions that mask hidden agendas cautiously with responses such as "It depends"

"Was I supposed to answer? I thought it was a rhetorical text."

or "Let me hear what you have in mind before I answer."

- *Questions that seek a positive judgment*. "How do I look?" is often a request for a particular response ("You look great!"). The listener must carefully consider the context before responding.
- *Questions based on unchecked assumptions*. "Why aren't you listening to me?" assumes the other person isn't paying attention. "What's the matter?" assumes that something is wrong. As we explained in Chapter 4, perception checking is a much better way of confirming assumptions. As you recall, a perception check offers a description of behavior and interpretations, followed by a sincere request for clarification: "When you keep looking at your phone, I think you're not listening to me, but maybe I'm wrong. Are you paying attention?"

Crime show franchises such as *CSI* and *Law & Order* are a fixture of television programming. Their main characters must listen carefully to do their jobs effectively. ***In what types of situations can you become a better listener by asking probing questions and analyzing statements critically?***

No question is inherently sincere or counterfeit, because the meaning and intent of any statement are shaped by its context. Moreover, a slight change in tone of voice or facial expression can turn a sincere question into a counterfeit one and vice versa. Consider how the questions "What are you doing?" or "When will you be finished?" could be asked in different ways, eliciting different responses.

Research about coming-out conversations (Manning, 2015) illustrates the delicate balance of using questions as an active listener. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual participants in a study said they wanted to hear certain types of questions from those who listened to their coming-out disclosures. Participants viewed sincere questions as indicators of open communication and a desire to understand. They didn't appreciate questions that seemed leading ("Are you sure this isn't a phase?"), defensive ("Is this because I wasn't around much?"), or inappropriate (asking for graphic sexual details). When a topic is sensitive and emotionally charged, it's best to keep your questions as open and neutral as possible. "Tell me more—I'm listening" is usually a good option—particularly when it's asked sincerely.

PARAPHRASING

Paraphrasing is providing feedback that restates, in your own words, the message you thought the speaker sent. You may wonder, "Why would I want to restate what's already been said?" Consider this simple exchange:

"Let's make plans for next weekend."
"So you want to chat next week to make plans for Saturday?"
"No, I meant we should check our calendars now to see if we're free to go to the game on Sunday."

By paraphrasing, the listener learned that the speaker wanted to make plans now, not later—and that "weekend" meant Sunday, not Saturday. Note that the listener rephrased rather than repeated the message. In effective paraphrasing, you restate what you think the speaker has said in your own words as a way of checking the meaning you've assigned to the message. It's important that you paraphrase, not "parrot-phrase." If you simply repeat the speaker's comments verbatim, you'll sound foolish—and just as important, you still might misunderstand what's been said.

Types of Paraphrasing Statements

Restating another person's message in a way that sounds natural can sometimes be a difficult skill to master. Here are three approaches to get you started:

1. Change the speaker's wording.

   Speaker: "Bilingual education is just another failed idea of bleeding-heart liberals."

   Paraphrase: "So, if I understand what you're saying, you're mad because you think bilingual ed sounds good, but it doesn't work?"
2. Offer an example of what you think the speaker is talking about. When the speaker makes an abstract statement, you may suggest a specific example or two to see if your understanding is accurate:

   Speaker: "Lee is such a jerk. I can't believe the way he acted last night."

   Paraphrase: "You thought those jokes were pretty offensive, huh?"
3. Reflect the underlying theme of the speaker's remarks. When you want to summarize the theme that seems to have run through another person's conversation, a complete or partial perception check is appropriate:

   Speaker: "Be safe tonight."

   Paraphrase: "Sounds like you're worried something's going to happen to me. Am I right?"

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" WOOF, WOOF, WOOF — BUT I'M PARAPHRASING. "

There are several reasons why paraphrasing assists listening. First, as the preceding examples illustrate, it allows you to find out if the message received is the message the sender intended. Second, paraphrasing often draws out further information from the speaker, much like questioning. (In fact, a good paraphrase often ends with a question such as, "Is that what you meant?") Third, paraphrasing is an ideal way to take the heat out of intense discussions. When conversations intensify, it is often because the people involved believe they aren't being heard. Rather than escalating the conflict, try paraphrasing what the other person says: "Okay, let me be sure I understand you. It sounds like you're concerned about . . ." Paraphrasing

usually short-circuits a defensive spiral because it assures the other person of your involvement and concern. For these and other reasons, we usually feel a sense of affinity for those who make the effort to paraphrase our messages (Weger et al., 2010).

Paraphrasing Factual Information

Summarizing facts, data, and details is important during personal or professional conversations. "We've agreed that we'll take another few days to think about our choices and make a decision on Tuesday—right?" might be an effective way to conclude a business lunch. A questioning tone should be used; a listener wants to be sure that meaning has been shared. Even personal topics are sometimes best handled on a factual level: "So for you the main issue is that our friends take up all the parking spaces in front of your place. Is that it?" Even if you are under attack, maintaining a neutral tone helps clarify facts before you offer your reaction. It is also a good idea to paraphrase instructions, directions, and decisions before acting on what you *think* has been said.

Paraphrasing Personal Information

Whereas restating factual information is relatively easy, it takes a sensitive ear to listen for others' thoughts, feelings, and wants. The underlying message is often the more important one, and effective listeners try to reflect what they hear at this level (Bodie et al., 2016). Listening for thoughts, feelings, and wants addresses three domains of human experience: cognitive (rational), affective (emotional), and behavioral (desired action). Read the following statement as if a friend were talking to you, and listen for all three components (think, feel, want) in the message:

> Maria has hardly been home all week—she's been so busy with work. She rushes in just long enough to eat dinner, then she buries herself writing code until bedtime. Then she tells me today that she's going out Saturday with some friends from high school. I guess the honeymoon is over.

What is the speaker thinking, feeling, and wanting? Paraphrasing can help you find out. Here are two possible responses:

"Sounds like you're unhappy (feeling) because you think Maria is ignoring you (thought) and you want her to spend more time with you (want)."

"So you're frustrated (feeling) because you'd like Maria to change (want), but you think it's hopeless because you have such different priorities (thought)."

Recognize that you may not be accurate with either option. Recognize also that you could identify an entirely different think-feel-want set. The fact that these examples offer distinct interpretations of the same message demonstrates the value of paraphrasing.

Your paraphrases don't have to be as long as these examples. It's often a good idea to mix paraphrasing with other listening responses. In many cases, you'll want to reflect only one or two of the think-feel-want components. The key is giving feedback that is appropriate for the situation and offering it in a way that assists the listening process. Because paraphrasing is likely to be an unfamiliar way of responding, it may feel awkward at first. Research suggests that rehearsing paraphrasing in imagined interactions can help you respond more effectively in actual conversations (Vickery et al., 2015). If you start by paraphrasing occasionally and then gradually do it more often, you can begin to see the benefits of this method.

EMPATHIZING

Empathizing is a response style listeners use when they want to show they *identify* with a speaker. As discussed in Chapter 4, empathy involves perspective taking, emotional contagion, and genuine concern. When listeners put the attitude of empathy into verbal and nonverbal responses, they engage in empathizing. Sometimes these responses can be quite brief: "Uh-huh," "I see," "Wow!," "Ouch!," "Whew!," "My goodness." In other cases, empathizing is expressed in statements such as these:

"I can see that really hurts."
"I know how important that was to you."
"It's no fun to feel unappreciated."
"I can tell you're really excited about that."
"Wow, that must be rough."
"I think I've felt that way, too."
"Looks like that really made your day."
"This means a lot to you, doesn't it?"

Empathizing falls near the middle of the listening response spectrum pictured in Figure 7.3. It is different from the more reflective responses at the left end of the spectrum, which attempt to gather information neutrally. It is also different from the more evaluative styles at the right end of the spectrum, which offer more direction than reflection. To understand how empathizing compares to other types of responses, consider these examples:

"So your boss isn't happy with your performance, and you're thinking about finding a new job." (Paraphrasing)
"Ouch—I'll bet it hurt when your boss said you weren't doing a good job." (Empathizing)
"Hey, you'll land on your feet—your boss doesn't appreciate what a star you are." (Supporting)

Notice that empathizing identifies with the speaker's emotions and perceptions more than paraphrasing does, yet offers less evaluation and agreement than supporting responses. In fact, it's possible to empathize with others while disagreeing with them (Gordon & Chen, 2016). For instance, the response "I can tell that this issue is important to you"

legitimizes a speaker's feelings without assenting to that person's point of view (note that it could be said to either a friend or a foe at a business meeting). Empathizing is therefore an important skill whether you agree or disagree with the speaker.

Perhaps a better way to explain empathizing is to describe what it *doesn't* sound like. Many listeners believe they are empathizing when, in fact, they are offering responses that are evaluative and directive—providing what has been called "cold comfort" (Burleson, 2003; Hample, 2011). Listeners are probably *not* empathizing when they display the following behaviors:

- *Denying others the right to their feelings.* Consider this common response to another person's problem: "Don't worry about it." Although the remark may be intended as a reassuring comment, the underlying message is that the speaker wants the person to feel differently. It's unlikely that people can or will stop worrying or being upset just because you tell them to do so. Research shows that attempting to identify with others' emotions is more effective than denying their feelings and perspectives (Burleson & Samter, 1985, 1994).
- *Minimizing the significance of the situation.* Think about the times someone said to you, "Hey, it's only _____." You can probably fill in the blank a variety of ways: "a game," "words," "a test," "a party." How did you react? You probably thought the person who said it just didn't understand. To someone who has been the victim of verbal abuse, the hurtful message wasn't "just words"; to a child who didn't get an invitation, it wasn't "just a party" (see Burleson, 1984); to a student who has flunked an important exam, it wasn't "just a test" (see Burleson & Samter, 1985). When you minimize the significance of someone else's experience, you aren't empathizing. Instead, you are interpreting the event from your perspective and then passing judgment—rarely a helpful response.
- *Focus on yourself.* It can be tempting to talk at length about a similar experience you've encountered ("I know exactly how you feel. Something like that happened to me—let me tell you about it. . . ."). Although your intent might be to show empathy, research shows that such messages aren't perceived as helpful because they draw attention away from the distressed person (Burleson, 2008).
- *Raining on the speaker's parade.* Most of the preceding examples deal with difficult situations or messages about pain. However, empathizing involves identifying with others' joys as well as their sorrows. Many of us can recall coming home with exciting news, only to be told "A 5 percent raise? That isn't so great." "An *A minus*? Why didn't you get an *A*?" "Big deal—I got one of those years ago." Taking the wind out of someone's sails is the opposite of empathizing. Research shows that we don't get the full enjoyment out of good news until we share it with someone who responds empathically (Lambert et al., 2013; Reis et al., 2010).

Watch and Discuss

Look up and watch the video "Brené Brown on Empathy."

1. Consider how some attempts at *empathizing* fall short of being helpful.
2. Discuss how you like others to respond when you tell them about struggles you're having.

Empathic listening is essentially an expression of affection, as it communicates validation and a sense of worth to the message-sender (Floyd, 2014). Research suggests that emotional intelligence is needed to offer these nonjudgmental, other-oriented responses (Pence & Vickery, 2012). Fortunately, research also indicates that both adults and children can learn the ability to offer such responses (Dexter, 2013). The exercises at the end of this chapter can offer you valuable practice in developing your skill as an empathic communicator.

SUPPORTING

So far, we have looked at listening responses that put a premium on being reflective and nonevaluative. However, there are times when other people want to hear more than a reflection of how *they* feel: They would like to know how *you* feel about *them*. **Supporting** responses reveal the listener's solidarity with the speaker's situation. Brant Burleson (2003) describes supporting as "expressions of care, concern, affection, and interest, especially during times of stress or upset" (p. 552). There are several types of supportive responses:

Agreement	"Yeah, that class was tough for me too." "You're right—the landlord is being unfair."
Offers to help	"I'm here if you need me." "Let me try to explain it to him."
Praise	"I don't care what the boss said: I think you did a great job!" "You're a terrific person! If she doesn't recognize it, that's her problem."
Reassurance	"The worst part seems to be over. It will probably get easier from here." "You've got this."
Diversion	"Let's catch a movie and get your mind off this." "That reminds me of the time we . . ."

Men and women often differ in the way they act in supporting others. Women are more likely than men to give supportive responses when presented with another person's problem (Burleson et al., 2005; Hale et al., 1997) and are more skillful at composing and processing such messages (Burleson et al., 2009, 2011). In fact, women who *aren't* skillful at offering emotional support to their female friends run the risk of being shunned by their same-sex peers (Holmstrom et al., 2005). By contrast, men tend to respond to others' problems by offering advice or by diverting the topic (Derlega et al., 1994; Woodward et al., 1996). This behavior may be due in part to societal norms that discourage men from offering sensitive emotional support (Burleson et al., 2005).

Yet men and women respond well to the same types of comforting messages. Both feel most supported by highly personal messages that are delivered with nonverbal immediacy such as touching and maintaining eye

contact (Jones & Burleson, 2003). Moreover, both men and women appreciate the kind of social support we describe in Chapter 9.

But even the most sincere supportive efforts don't always help. Mourners suffering from the recent death of a loved one often report that a majority of the comments made to them are unhelpful (Davidowitz & Myrick, 1984; Glanz, 2007). Most of these statements are advice: "You've got to get out more" and "Don't question God's will." Another frequent response is an attempt to offer perspective, such as, "She's out of pain now" and "Time heals all wounds." A study of bereaved parents found that these kinds of clichés actually do more harm than good (Toller, 2011). People who are grieving don't appreciate being told how to feel or what they should do. Instead, bereaved parents said they would feel more supported by the silent listening approach described on page 208. One mother who lost a child offered this recommendation for people who want to help a grieving friend:

> Go and be with them. You don't have to say anything, just say, "I don't know how you feel, but I'm here." Go sit down and just be with that person. What I wouldn't have given to have somebody come and knock on the door and stop in. (Toller, 2011, p. 26)

At times, offering support can be welcome, but sometimes it isn't helpful. ***Use the information in this section to construct personal guidelines for when and how to offer support. How can you apply these guidelines in an important relationship?***

As with the other helping styles, supporting can be beneficial, but only under certain conditions (Goldsmith & Fitch, 1997; Halone & Pecchioni, 2001):

- *Make sure your expression of support is sincere.* Phony agreement or encouragement is probably worse than no support at all because it adds the insult of your dishonesty to whatever pain the other person is already feeling.
- *Be sure the other person can accept your support.* Sometimes people are so upset that they aren't ready or able to hear anything positive. When you know a friend is going through a difficult time, it's important not to be overly intrusive before that person is ready to talk and receive your support (Clark & Delia, 1997).
- *Focus on "here and now" rather than "then and there."* Although it's sometimes true that "You'll feel better tomorrow," it sometimes isn't. More important, focusing on the future avoids supporting in the present. Even if the prediction that "ten years from now, you won't even remember her name" proves correct, it gives little comfort to someone experiencing heartbreak today.

ANALYZING

In **analyzing** a situation, the listener offers an interpretation of a speaker's message ("I think what's really bothering you is . . ."; "She's doing it because . . ."; or "Maybe the problem started when he . . ."). Communicators who respond this way often use the analytical listening style described earlier in this chapter (page 201). This style can be effective in helping others see alternative meanings of a situation. Sometimes an analysis helps clarify a confusing problem, providing a more objective understanding. Research suggests that analytic listeners are able to hear others' concerns without becoming upset themselves, which can be an advantage in problem solving (Weaver & Kirtley, 1995).

In other cases, an analysis can create more problems than it solves, for two reasons. First, your interpretation may not be correct, in which case the problem holder may become even more confused by accepting it. Second, even if your analysis is accurate, sharing it with the problem holder might not be useful. There's a chance that it will arouse defensiveness (analysis implies being superior and in a position to evaluate). Besides, the problem holder may not be able to understand your view of the problem without working it out personally.

How can you know when it's helpful to offer an analysis? Here are some guidelines to follow:

- *Offer your interpretation in a tentative way rather than as absolute fact.* There's a big difference between saying "Maybe the reason is . . ." and insisting "This is the truth."
- *Your analysis ought to have a reasonable chance of being correct.* An inaccurate interpretation—especially one that sounds plausible—can leave a person more confused than before.
- *Make sure the other person will be receptive to your analysis.* Even if your interpretation is completely accurate, your thoughts won't help if the problem holder isn't ready to consider them. Pay attention to the other person's verbal and nonverbal cues to see how your analysis is being received.
- *Be sure that your motive for offering an analysis is truly to help the other person.* It can be tempting to offer an analysis to show how brilliant you are or even to make the other person feel bad for not having thought of the right answer in the first place. Needless to say, an analysis offered under such conditions isn't helpful.

EVALUATING

An **evaluating** response appraises the sender's thoughts or behaviors in some way. The evaluation may be favorable ("That's a good idea" or "You're on the right track now") or unfavorable ("An attitude like that won't get you anywhere"). In either case, it implies that the person evaluating is in some way qualified to pass judgment on the speaker's thoughts or actions. Communicators who respond this way often approach situations with the critical listening style described earlier in this chapter (page 201).

Sometimes negative evaluations are purely critical. How many times have you heard responses such as "Well, you asked for it!," or "I told you so!," or "You're just feeling sorry for yourself"? Such comments usually make matters worse by arousing defensiveness.

Other times, negative evaluations are less critical. These involve what we usually call *constructive criticism*, which is intended to help the problem holder improve in the future. Friends give this sort of response about the choice of everything from clothing, to jobs, to friends. A common setting for constructive criticism is school, where instructors evaluate students' work to help them master concepts and skills. Even constructive criticism can arouse defensiveness because it may threaten the self-concept of the person at whom it is directed (see Chapter 12 for tips on creating supportive communication climates).

Media Clip

Responding Directively: *Scandal*

If you're sad and want a shoulder to cry on, Olivia Pope (Kerry Washington) isn't the best choice. But if you're in a jam and need advice, she's the right person for the job.

As the show's title suggests, most people who seek Pope's help are embroiled in some sort of scandal. As she listens to their problems, Olivia doesn't have much time for, or interest in, expressing sympathy for their plight. Instead, she moves quickly to apply her expertise to their dilemmas. Along the way, she often tells people to toughen up, move on, and not waste time on emotional displays.

In terms of listening responses, Olivia is short on empathizing and long on advising. That's what her clients are paying for: a tough-minded professional who knows her way out of a scandal.

ADVISING

When approached with another's problem, the most common reaction is **advising** (Feng & Magen, 2016). We're all familiar with advising responses: "If you're so unhappy, you should just quit the job"; "Just tell him what you think"; "You should take some time off."

Even though advice might be just what a person needs, there are several reasons why it often isn't helpful. First, it may not offer the best suggestion about how to act. There's often a temptation to tell others how you would behave in their place, but it's important to realize that what's right for one person may not be right for another. Second, the position of advice recipient is a potentially unwelcome identity because it may imply inferiority (Shaw & Hepburn, 2013). Third, a related consequence of advising is that it often allows others to avoid responsibility for their decisions. A partner who follows a suggestion of yours that doesn't work out can always pin the blame on you. Finally, people often don't want advice: They may not be ready to accept it and instead may simply need to talk out their thoughts and feelings.

FOCUS ON RESEARCH

Exchanging Advice Online

Once upon a time, if you wanted medical recommendations from someone other than a professional, you picked up the phone and called a friend or family member. Today, it's not uncommon to solicit advice from a virtual stranger—with *virtual* being the operative term.

Elizabeth Sillence categorized and analyzed advice exchanges in an online breast cancer support group site. Here are some of her observations:

- Nearly 40 percent of the posted messages involved advice seeking or giving—so it's clearly a site where people look for and extend counsel.
- Very few posters asked the community to tell them what they "should do." They typically requested "comments" rather than "advice."
- Recommendations were often couched within personal narratives, using a "here's what worked for me" format.
- Advice seekers tried to find people who were "in the same boat," preferring to hear from those whose situations matched their own.

These observations reinforce some important principles about communicating advice. People are more willing to listen to advice that's requested, especially when it comes from a credible, empathic source. When giving advice, it's best to offer it as openhanded information rather than as heavy-handed prescriptions.

Sillence, E. (2013). Giving and receiving peer advice in an online breast cancer support group. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 16*, 480–485.

Studies on advice giving (summarized in MacGeorge et al., 2008) offer the following important considerations when trying to help others:

- *Is the advice needed?* If the person has already taken a course of action, giving advice after the fact ("I can't believe you got back together with him") is rarely appreciated.
- *Is the advice wanted?* People generally don't value unsolicited advice. It's usually best to ask if the speaker is interested in hearing your counsel. Remember that sometimes people just want a listening ear, not solutions to their problems.
- *Is the advice given in the right sequence?* Advice is more likely to be received after the listener first offers empathizing, paraphrasing, and questioning responses to understand the speaker and the situation better.
- *Is the advice coming from an expert?* If you want to offer advice about anything from car purchasing to relationship managing, it's important to have experience and success in those matters. If you *don't* have expertise, it's a good idea to offer the speaker supportive responses, then encourage the person to seek out expert counsel.
- *Is the advisor a close and trusted person?* Although sometimes we seek out advice from people we don't know well (perhaps because

they have expertise), in most cases we value advice given within the context of a close and ongoing interpersonal relationship.

- *Is the advice offered in a sensitive, face-saving manner?* No one likes to feel bossed or belittled, even if the advice is good (Miczo & Burgoon, 2008). Remember that messages have both content and relational dimensions. Sometimes the unstated relational messages when giving advice ("I'm smarter than you"; "You're not bright enough to figure this out yourself") will keep people from hearing counsel.

WHICH RESPONSE TYPE TO USE?

You can see that each type of listening response has advantages and disadvantages. So which type is best? There isn't a simple answer to this question. All response types and styles have the potential to help others accept their situation, feel better, and have a sense of control over their problems (Imhof, 2003; Weger et al., 2014).

As a rule of thumb, it's probably wise to begin with responses from the left side of the listening response spectrum: silent listening, questioning, paraphrasing, and empathizing. These skills comprise what pioneering therapist Carl Rogers (2003) called *active listening* (see also Weger et al., 2014). Rogers maintained that helpful interpersonal listening begins with reflective, nondirective responses. Once you've gathered the facts and demonstrated your interest and concern, it's likely that the speaker will be more receptive to (and perhaps even ask for) your analyzing, evaluating, and advising responses (MacGeorge et al., 2017).

You can boost the odds of choosing the best response in each situation by considering three factors:

1. Think about the *situation*, and match your response to the nature of the problem. People sometimes need your advice. In other cases, your encouragement and support will be most helpful; and in still other instances, your analysis or judgment may be truly useful. And, as you have seen, there are times when your questioning and paraphrasing can help others find their own answer.
2. Besides considering the situation, you also should think about the *other person* when deciding which approach to use. It's important to be sure that the other person is open to receiving *any* kind of help. Furthermore, you need to be confident that you will be regarded as someone whose support is valuable. The same listening response can be regarded as helpful or not depending on who's delivering it (Rossetto, 2015). Consider how an "insider" to your job, social circle, or family can offer encouragement or advice ("Hang in there—it will get better") that might ring hollow if it came from an "outsider."

   It's also important to match the type of response you offer with the style of the person to whom it is directed (Bippus, 2001).

One study found that highly rational people tend to respond more positively to advice than do more emotional people (Feng & Lee, 2010). Many communicators are extremely defensive and aren't capable of receiving analysis or judgments without lashing out. Still others aren't equipped to think through problems clearly enough to profit from questioning and paraphrasing. Sophisticated listeners choose a style that fits the person.

3. Finally, think about *yourself* when deciding how to respond. Most of us reflexively use one or two styles. You may be best at listening quietly, posing a question, or paraphrasing from time to time. Or perhaps you are especially insightful and can offer a truly useful analysis of the problem. Of course, it's also possible to rely on a response style that is *unhelpful*. You may be overly judgmental or too eager to advise, even when your suggestions are invited or productive. As you think about how to respond to another's problems, consider your weaknesses as well as your strengths.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Objective 7.1 Describe the nature of listening and the listening styles that interpersonal communicators use.

Listening is both more frequent and less emphasized than speaking. Despite its relative invisibility, listening is at least as important as speaking. Research shows that good listening is vital for both personal and professional success.

Listening is the process of making sense of others' spoken messages. We listen to many messages mindlessly, but it's important to listen mindfully in a variety of situations. We also listen to others based on our personal styles and listening goals. Sometimes our listening is task oriented; other times it's more relational, analytical, or critical. Good listeners match their styles with the needs of the situation.

Q: Keep a diary of your listening behavior for a representative day. Identify your listening style(s) in each situation you record. Which styles did you use most and least often? How satisfied are you with this finding?

Objective 7.2 Explain the challenges that can impede effective listening.

Most peoples' understanding of listening is based on poor listening habits and also on several misconceptions that communicators need to correct. Mindful listening is not easy; rather, it is a challenge that requires much effort and talent. Several barriers can hamper effective listening: personal concerns, information overload, rapid thought, and both internal and external noise. Even careful listening does not mean that all listeners will receive the same message. A wide variety of factors discussed in this chapter can result in widely varying interpretations of even simple statements.

Q: For each entry in the diary from Objective 7.1, evaluate how effectively you listened. Which

of the challenges described in this chapter interfered most with your listening? How can you better manage those challenges?

Objective 7.3 Identify the five components of the interpersonal listening process.

Listening consists of several components: hearing, attending to a message, understanding the statement, recalling the message after the passage of time, and responding to the speaker. Roadblocks to effective communication can occur at each stage of the process.

Q: Use the events in your diary to identify your strengths and weaknesses as a listener. Which components of the listening process do you manage well, and which are problematic? How can you address the problematic components?

Objective 7.4 Effectively use a variety of reflective and directive listening responses.

Listening responses are important because they let us know if others are truly tuned in to what we're saying. Listening responses can be placed on a continuum. More reflective/less directive responses include silent listening, questioning, paraphrasing, and empathizing. These put a premium on gathering information and showing interest and concern. Less reflective/more directive responses include supporting, analyzing, evaluating, and advising. These put a premium on offering input and direction. It is possible to use the "more reflective" listening responses to help people arrive at their own decisions without offering advice or evaluation. The most effective listeners use several styles, depending on the situation, the other person, and their own personal skills and motivation.

Q: Use your listening diary to identify your most and least frequent response styles. How satisfied are you with your findings? How can you respond more effectively?

KEY TERMS

- Advising (219)
- Analytical listening (201)
- Analyzing (218)
- Attending (204)
- Closed questions (209)
- Counterfeit questions (210)
- Critical listening (201)
- Empathizing (214)
- Evaluating (218)
- Hearing (198)
- Listening (197)
- Listening fidelity (206)
- Mindful listening (198)
- Mindless listening (198)
- Open questions (209)
- Paraphrasing (211)
- Questioning (209)
- Relational listening (199)
- Remembering (206)
- Responding (206)
- Silent listening (208)
- Sincere questions (210)
- Supporting (216)
- Task-oriented listening (199)
- Understanding (205)

ACTIVITIES

1. With your classmates, develop a listening code of ethics. What responsibility do communicators have to listen as carefully and thoughtfully as possible to other speakers? Are there ever cases where the poor listening habits listed on pages 203–204 (e.g., pseudolistening, stage hogging, and defensive listening) are justified? How would you feel if you knew that others weren't listening to you?

2. Explore the benefits of silent listening by using a "talking stick." Richard Hyde (1993) developed this exercise from the Native American tradition of "council." Gather a group of people in a circle, and designate a particular item as the talking stick. Participants will then pass the stick around the circle. Participants may speak

a. only when holding the stick;

b. for as long as they hold the stick; and

c. without interruption from anyone else in the circle.

When a member is through speaking, the stick passes to the left and the speaker surrendering the stick must wait until it has made its way around the circle before speaking again.

After each member of the group has had the chance to speak, discuss how this experience differs from more common approaches to listening. Decide how the desirable parts of this method could be introduced in everyday conversations.

3. Practice your ability to paraphrase by following these steps.

a. Choose a partner, and designate one of you as A and the other as B. Find a subject on which you and your partner seem to disagree—a personal dispute, a philosophical or moral issue, or perhaps a matter of personal taste.

b. A begins by making a statement on the subject. B's job is to paraphrase the idea. In this step, B should only reiterate what he or she heard A say, without adding any judgment or interpretation. B's job here is simply to *understand* A—not to agree or disagree with A.

c. A responds by telling B whether the response was accurate and by making any necessary additions or corrections to clarify the message.

d. B then paraphrases the revised statement. This process should continue until A is sure that B understands him or her.

e. Now B and A reverse roles and repeat the procedure in steps a–d. Continue the conversation until both partners are satisfied that they have explained themselves fully and have been understood by the other person.

After the discussion has ended, consider how this process differed from typical conversations on controversial topics. Was there greater understanding here? Do the partners feel better about one another? Finally, ask yourself how your life might change if you used more paraphrasing in everyday conversations.

4. Explore the various types of listening responses by completing the following steps.

a. Join with two partners to form a trio. Designate members as A, B, and C.

b. A begins by sharing a current, real problem with B. The problem needn't be a major life crisis, but it should be a real one. B should respond in whatever way seems most helpful. C's job is to categorize each response by B as silent listening, questioning, paraphrasing, empathizing, supporting, analyzing, evaluating, or advising.

c. After a 4- to 5-minute discussion, C should summarize B's response styles. A then describes which of the styles were most helpful and which were not helpful.

d. Repeat the same process two more times, switching roles so that each person has been in all of the positions.

e. Based on their findings, the trio should develop conclusions about what combination of response styles can be most helpful.

SCORING FOR ASSESSING YOUR COMMUNICATION (PAGE 200)

Add your responses to items 1–4. This is your Relational Listening score: _____. Undergraduate students had an average score of 22, with most scoring between 21 and 24.

Add your responses to items 5–8. This is your Analytical Listening score: _____. Undergraduate students had an average score of 19, with most scoring between 17 and 21.

Add your responses to items 9–12. This is your Task Listening score: _____. Undergraduate students had an average score of 20, with most scoring between 18 and 22.

Add your responses to items 13–16. This is your Critical Listening score: _____. Undergraduate students had an average score of 18, with most scoring between 16 and 20.

8

Emotions

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

8.1 Explain how emotions are experienced and expressed.

8.2 Describe the various personal and social influences on emotional expression.

8.3 Demonstrate how to express your emotions appropriately and effectively.

8.4 Distinguish between facilitative and debilitative emotions, and explain how reappraisal may be used to manage emotions effectively.

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IMAGINE HOW different your life would be if you lost your ability to experience emotions. An emotionless world would be free of boredom, frustration, fear, and loneliness. But it would also be without joy, pride, excitement, and love. Few of us would be willing to make that sort of trade-off.

Daniel Goleman (1995) coined the term **emotional intelligence** to describe the ability to understand and manage one's own emotions and to be sensitive to others' feelings. Goleman maintains that success depends in great part on one's "EQ"—emotional intelligence quota. In support of that claim, studies show that emotional intelligence is positively linked with self-esteem and life satisfaction (Carmeli et al., 2009), healthy conflict communication (Smith et al., 2008), empathic listening abilities (Pence & Vickery, 2012), and effective workplace interactions (Miao et al., 2017). Some employers even use emotional intelligence measures as part of their personnel selection process (Iliescu et al., 2012).

Stop for a moment and identify someone you know who is emotionally intelligent. Perhaps it's a family member who is in touch with a wide range of feelings without being overwhelmed by them, or a boss who makes wise and rational choices even under stress. Now think of a person who might be lacking emotional intelligence. Maybe it's a colleague who is uptight and dismissive about honest human feelings, or a friend who blows up at the smallest inconvenience. And finally, assess your own emotional intelligence. How well do *you* understand and manage your emotions, and how sensitive are you to others' feelings? The Assessing Your Communication tool on page 243 can help you make that call.

Because emotions are such an important part of human communication, in this chapter we explore what feelings are, discuss the ways they are handled in contemporary society, and see how recognizing and expressing them can improve relationships. We also provide some guiding principles that should give you a clearer idea of when and how to express your emotions constructively. Finally, we explore methods for coping with troublesome feelings and enhancing positive emotions.

Media Clip

Intelligence of Another Variety: *The Big Bang Theory*

Sheldon Cooper (Jim Parsons) is a theoretical physicist who holds two doctorates. But although he may be book smart, Sheldon lacks emotional intelligence. He's short on empathy, social skills, and the ability to express his emotions effectively. He can also be blunt and sarcastic (punctuating his wisecracks with "Bazinga!"). Whereas viewers may find Cooper's ineptitude amusing, it usually doesn't help his relationships with friends and coworkers.

Think of some of the other characters on *The Big Bang Theory* and you'll realize that emotional intelligence is best seen on a continuum—and some people have more of it than others. The good news is that emotional intelligence can grow, as Sheldon demonstrates. Over the course of several seasons, he begins picking up on emotional cues from others (very slowly).

WHAT ARE EMOTIONS?

Suppose an extraterrestrial visitor asked you to explain emotions. How would you answer? You might start by saying that emotions are things that we feel. But this doesn't say much, for in turn you would probably describe feelings as synonymous with emotions. Social scientists generally agree that there are several components to the phenomena we label as an emotion (Gentsch et al., 2014; Planalp et al., 2006).

PHYSIOLOGICAL CHANGES

When we experience strong emotions, many bodily changes occur (Chang et al., 2013). For example, the physiological components of fear include increased heart rate, elevated blood pressure, increased adrenaline secretions, elevated blood sugar, slowed digestion, and pupil dilation. Marriage researcher John Gottman notes that symptoms such as these occur when couples engage in intense conflicts (Gottman & Silver, 1999). He calls the condition "flooding" and has found that it impedes effective problem solving.

Research supports the notion that we experience emotions not just in the mind but throughout the body (Nummenmaa et al., 2014). As Figure 8.1 shows, disgust may turn our stomachs, fear can tighten our chest, and happiness can make us feel warm all over. Noticing physiological sensations such as these can offer a significant clue to your emotions.

FIGURE 8.1
Body Temperatures Associated with Various Emotions

NONVERBAL BEHAVIOR

Not all physical changes that accompany emotions are internal. Emotions are often apparent from observable physiological changes, such as blushing or perspiring. Other changes involve behavior: a distinctive facial expression, posture, gestures, different vocal tone and rate, and so on. These reactions can often be noticed and interpreted by others. Subjects who watched short videos of basketball and table tennis players could reliably determine from the players' nonverbal behavior alone whether the athletes were winning or losing, regardless of the subject's own experience with the sport (Furley & Schweizer, 2014).

Although it's reasonably easy to tell when someone is feeling a strong emotion, it's more difficult to be certain exactly what that emotion might be. A slumped posture and sigh may be a sign of sadness or possibly just fatigue. Likewise, widened eyes might indicate excitement or fear. As you learned in Chapter 6, nonverbal behavior is generally ambiguous and can easily be misread.

We usually think of nonverbal behavior as the reaction to an emotional state, but there may be times when the reverse is true—when nonverbal behavior *causes* emotions. For instance, clenching your fists can help you feel stronger (Schubert & Koole, 2009), and walking with an upbeat strut can stave off feelings of depression (Michalak et al., 2015). (For more examples of nonverbal behaviors affecting emotions, see Chapter 6, p. 175). As behavioral scientists like to say, it can be easier to act yourself into new ways of feeling than to feel yourself into new ways of acting.

Nonverbal expressions of emotion are often interconnected with verbal ones. One study showed that participants who generated words associated with pride and disappointment experienced a change in posture (Oosterwijk et al., 2009). They unconsciously stood taller when talking about pride and slumped when using words for disappointment. The participants also experienced emotions associated with their words (e.g., feeling sad when speaking about disappointment).

COGNITIVE INTERPRETATIONS

The mind plays an important role in determining how we feel (Genov, 2001). Interestingly, the physiological changes associated with fear are similar to those that accompany excitement, joy, and other emotions (Nummenmaa et al., 2014). In other words, based on physiological responses alone, it may be difficult to distinguish between trembling with fear and quivering with excitement. Sometimes it's a matter of interpretation and labeling.

For example, researchers found that some successful athletes experiencing precompetition stress labeled their feelings in positive emotional terms ("I'm pumped and ready to go"), which helped their performance (Mallalieu et al., 2003). The same holds true for emotion interpretation before public speaking: Telling yourself "I am excited" rather than "Calm down" will generally lead to a more successful presentation (Brooks, 2013).

As the old adage goes, you may not be able to get rid of butterflies in your stomach, but you can get them to fly in formation.

Some researchers have concluded that the experiences of fright, joy, or anger come primarily from the labels—and the accompanying cognitive interpretations—we give to our physical symptoms (Kagan, 2007). Psychologist Philip Zimbardo (1977) offers a good example of this principle:

> I notice I'm perspiring while lecturing. From that I infer I am nervous. If it occurs often, I might even label myself a "nervous person." Once I have the label, the next question I must answer is "Why am I nervous?" Then I start to search for an appropriate explanation. I might notice some students leaving the room, or being inattentive. I am nervous because I'm not giving a good lecture. That makes me nervous. How do I know it's not good? Because I'm boring my audience. I am nervous because I am a boring lecturer and I want to be a good lecturer. I feel inadequate. Maybe I should open a delicatessen instead. Just then a student says, "It's hot in here, I'm perspiring and it makes it tough to concentrate on your lecture." Instantly, I'm no longer "nervous" or "boring." (p. 53)

Social scientists refer to this process as **reappraisal**—rethinking the meaning of emotionally charged events in ways that alter their emotional impact (Berger & Lee, 2011; Troy et al., 2013). Research shows that reappraisal is vastly superior to suppressing one's feelings: It often leads to lower stress and increased productivity (Wallace et al., 2009). Reappraisal has both psychological and physiological benefits (Denson et al., 2011), regardless of a person's age or culture (Goodman & Southam-Gerow, 2010; Haga et al., 2009).

Reappraisal also has relational benefits (Jones et al., 2017). One study found that couples who regularly step back from their conflicts and reappraise them from a neutral perspective have higher levels of relational satisfaction (Finkel et al., 2013). In essence, these couples reduce the emotional impact of their disputes by looking at them rationally and dispassionately. (See the "Watch and Discuss" video referenced on this page.) We walk you through the reappraisal process later in this chapter when we describe how to dispute your irrational beliefs.

Watch and Discuss

Look up and watch Eli Finkel's TEDx Talk on "The Marriage Hack."

1) Consider the role of *reappraisal* in the process he describes.
2) Discuss how you could use this "hack" to help manage conflicts with your loved ones.

VERBAL EXPRESSION

As you read in Chapter 6, nonverbal behavior is a powerful way of communicating emotion. But sometimes words are necessary to express feelings. Saying "I'm really angry" is clearer and more helpful than stomping out of the room, and "I'm feeling nervous" might help explain a pained expression on your face. Putting emotions into words can help you manage them more effectively (Lieberman et al., 2007), whereas leaving them unspoken can be personally and interpersonally harmful (Chervonsky & Hunt, 2017).

Many researchers believe there are several "basic" or "primary" emotions (Katzir & Eyal, 2013; Phillips & Slessor, 2011). However, there isn't total agreement among scholars about what those emotions are or

FIGURE 8.2 Intensity of Emotions

what makes them "basic" (Tracy & Randles, 2011). Moreover, emotions that are primary in one culture may not be primary in others, and some emotions may have no equivalent in other cultures (Zhong et al., 2008). Despite this debate, most scholars acknowledge that *anger*, *joy*, *fear*, *sadness*, and *disgust* are common and typical human emotions (Ekman, 2016).

We experience most emotions with different degrees of intensity—and we use specific emotion words to represent these differences. Figure 8.2 illustrates this point. To say you're "annoyed" when a friend breaks an important promise, for example, would probably be an understatement. In other cases, people chronically overstate the strength of their feelings, saying that everything is either "wonderful" or "terrible." The problem with this sort of exaggeration is that when a truly intense emotion comes along, there are no words left to describe it adequately. If chocolate chip cookies from the local bakery are "fantastic," how does it feel to fall in love?

INFLUENCES ON EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION

Each of us is born with the disposition to reveal our emotions, at least nonverbally. Babies smile, frown, giggle, and cry whenever the mood strikes them. But over time, a wide range of differences develops in emotional expression. In the next few pages, we look at some influences that shape how people communicate their feelings.

PERSONALITY

Science has established an increasingly clear relationship between personality and the way people experience and communicate emotions (McCroskey et al., 2004). For example, extroverted people report more positive emotions in everyday life than more introverted individuals (Lucas et al., 2008). Conversely, people with neurotic personalities—those with a tendency to worry, be anxious, and feel apprehensive—report more negative emotions than less neurotic individuals.

Although personality can be a powerful force, it doesn't have to govern your communication satisfaction. For instance, people who are shy by nature can devise comfortable and effective strategies for reaching out, such as making contact with others online (Yen et al., 2012). Online relationships shouldn't be a way to avoid in-person communication (Ebeling-Witte et al., 2007), but they can be a rewarding way to gain confidence that will pay off in more satisfying face-to-face relationships.

FOCUS ON RESEARCH

Managing Grief with Humor

Grief is one of the most difficult emotions to bear, creating psychological and even physical pain. It can also strain relationships, in part because it's hard to know how to comfort someone who's mourning. Communication researcher Melanie Booth-Butterfield and her colleagues wanted to know if humor can play a role in coping with the anguish of grief.

The researchers surveyed 484 people who had recently experienced the death of a loved one. The respondents answered questions about their sense of humor and emotional coping strategies. They also were asked about their use of humor during the bereavement process, as well as emotional and physical symptoms they experienced.

Results showed that humor can help people function more effectively during grieving. Those with a strong sense of humor reported fewer negative symptoms, as well as greater coping abilities. It's noteworthy that men used humor more than women did during grieving, and that it benefited them more.

Certainly there are inappropriate times and ways to use humor during bereavement. But the researchers concluded it can be healthy to crack a smile or enjoy a laugh during the grieving process. And if you're supporting grieving friends or family, give them room to use levity as part of the process. It might be the best way to manage a profoundly difficult emotion.

Booth-Butterfield, M., Wanzer, M. B., Weil, N., & Krezmien, E. (2014). Communication of humor during bereavement: Intrapersonal and interpersonal emotion management strategies. *Communication Quarterly, 62,* 436-454.

CULTURE

Although people around the world experience the same emotions, the same events can generate quite different feelings in different cultures. The notion of eating snails might bring a smile of delight to some residents of France, although it would cause many North Americans to grimace in disgust. Culture also has an effect on how emotions are valued. One study (Tsai et al., 2006) found that Asian Americans and Hong Kong Chinese value "low arousal positive affect" such as being calm, relaxed, and peaceful. European Americans, by contrast, tend to value "high arousal positive affect" such as excitement, enthusiasm, and elation. More specifically, communication researcher Christina Kotchemidova (2010) notes that the United States is known internationally as a "culture of cheerfulness." She cites a Polish author who describes U.S. expressiveness this way: "Wow! Great! How nice! That's fantastic! I had a terrific time! It was wonderful! Have a nice day! Americans. So damned cheerful" (p. 209).

One of the most significant factors influencing emotional expression is the position of a culture on the individualism–collectivism spectrum (Halberstadt & Lozada, 2011). Members of collectivistic cultures, such as Japan and India, prize harmony among members of their "in-group" and discourage expression of any negative emotions that might upset relationships among people who belong to it. By contrast, members of highly individualistic cultures, such as the United States and Canada, feel comfortable revealing their feelings to people with whom they are close. Individualists

and collectivists also handle emotional expression with members of outgroups differently. Whereas individualists are quite frank about expressing negative emotions toward outsiders, collectivists are more likely to hide emotions such as disliking (Ting-Toomey, 2017). It's easy to see how differences in display rules can lead to communication problems. For example, individualistic North Americans might view collectivistic Asians as less than candid, whereas people raised in Asia could easily regard North Americans as overly demonstrative.

The phrase "I love you" offers an interesting case study of cultural differences in emotion expression. Researchers found that Americans say "I love you" more frequently (and to more people) than do members of most other cultures (Gareis & Wilkins, 2011). It's not that love isn't a universal experience; rather, there are significant cultural differences about when, where, how often, and with whom the phrase should be used. For instance, Middle Easterners in the study said that "I love you" should be expressed only between spouses, and they warned that American men who use the phrase cavalierly with Middle Eastern women might be misinterpreted as making a marriage proposal. They were not alone; study participants from a variety of backgrounds (e.g., Eastern Europe, India, Korea) said they use the phrase quite sparingly, believing that its power and meaning would be lost if used too often. However, one factor was consistent across cultures: Women tend to say "I love you" more often than men. For more examples of the effect that gender has on emotion expression, read on.

GENDER

Even within a culture, gender roles often shape the ways in which men and women experience and express their emotions (Lee et al., 2013; Wester et al., 2002). For example, research suggests that women are faster than men at recognizing emotions from facial cues (Hampson et al., 2006); are better at identifying multiple emotions (Hall & Matsumoto, 2004); are better at judging emotions from eye behavior alone (Kirkland et al., 2013); and are more stimulated by emotional data and remember them better than men do (Spalek et al., 2015).

Research on emotional expression suggests that there is also some truth in the cultural stereotype of the inexpressive male and the more demonstrative female. On the whole, women seem more likely than men to verbally and nonverbally express a wide range of feelings (Palomares, 2008). Men are more likely to experience what scholars call *alexithymia*—a reluctance to talk about feelings, which can lead to relational challenges (Hesse et al., 2012, 2015). One study showed that fathers mask their emotions more than mothers do, which led their children to have more difficulty reading their fathers' emotional expressions (Dunsmore et al., 2009).

"If I were a car, you could find the words."

And suppression of emotion by husbands is a strong predictor of dissatisfaction and discord in the early years of marriage (Velotti et al., 2016). It's not surprising then that psychologists and social commentators recommend that boys and men be encouraged to express their feelings in open and constructive ways (Pollack, 2006; Reiner, 2016).

The point is, although men and women generally experience the same emotions, there are some significant differences in the ways they read and express them (Brody & Hall, 2008). These differences are due in large measure to social conventions, which we discuss now.

SOCIAL CONVENTIONS AND ROLES

In mainstream U.S. society, the unwritten rules of communication discourage the direct verbal expression of most emotions (Durik et al., 2006). Count the number of genuine emotional expressions you hear over a 2- or 3-day period ("I'm angry"; "I feel embarrassed") and you'll discover that such expressions are rare. People are generally comfortable making statements of fact and often delight in expressing their opinions, but they rarely disclose how they feel. They tend to *act* out rather than *talk* out their emotions.

Not surprisingly, the emotions that people do share directly are usually positive ("I'm happy to say . . ."; "I really enjoyed . . ."). Scholars offer detailed descriptions of the ways contemporary society discourages expressions of anger. North Americans today strive to suppress this "unpleasant" emotion in almost every context, including child rearing, the workplace, and personal relationships (Kotchemidova, 2010). One study of married couples (Shimanoff, 1985) revealed that the partners shared complimentary feelings ("I love you") or face-saving ones ("I'm sorry I yelled at you"). They also willingly disclosed both positive and negative feelings about absent third parties ("I like Fred"; "I'm uncomfortable around Gloria"). On the other hand, the spouses rarely verbalized face-threatening feelings ("I'm disappointed in you") or hostility ("I'm mad at you").

This isn't to suggest that restricting emotion expression is always a bad idea. Researchers use the term **emotional labor** to describe situations in which managing and even suppressing emotions are both appropriate and necessary (Butler & Modaff, 2012). Studies show that emotional labor is an important component of many if not most occupations (see the At Work box in this section for specific examples).

SOCIAL MEDIA

Communicators generally express more emotion online than they do in person (Derks et al., 2008). In some cases, that's good news. Those who have trouble sharing feelings face to face may find a freedom to do so behind the safety of a keyboard or touchscreen. Consider how it might be easier to type, rather than say, the words "I'm embarrassed" or "I love you."

@work Emotional Labor on the Job

The rules for expressing emotions in the workplace are clearly different from those in personal life. In intimate relationships (at least in mainstream Western culture), it's often important to tell friends, family, and loved ones how you feel. In the workplace, however, it can be just as important to *conceal* emotions for the sake of clients, customers, coworkers, and supervisors—and also to protect your job.

Emotional labor—the process of managing and sometimes suppressing emotions—has been studied in a variety of occupational contexts. Here are a few examples:

- If firefighters don't mask their emotions of fear, disgust, and stress, it impedes their ability to help the people whose lives they are trying to save. Emotion-management training is therefore vital for new firefighters (Scott & Myers, 2005).
- Correctional officers at two minimum-security prisons described the challenge of needing to be "warm, nurturing, and respectful" to inmates while also being "suspicious, strong, and tough." The officers acknowledged that it's taxing to manage competing emotions and juggle conflicting demands (Tracy, 2005).
- Money is an emotion-laden topic, which means that financial planners often engage in emotional labor. Researchers concluded that "relationships and communication with clients may indeed be more central to the work of financial planners than portfolio performance reports and changes in estate tax laws" (Miller & Kiersten, 2008, p. 23).

Whereas some of these occupations deal with life-and-death situations, emotion management is equally important in less intensive jobs (Eschenfelder, 2012; Sanders, 2013). For instance, most customer-service positions require working with people who may express their dissatisfaction in angry and inappropriate ways ("I hate this store—I'm never shopping here again!"). In situations such as these, it's usually unwise to "fight fire with fire," even if that's your natural impulse. Instead, competent on-the-job communicators can use the listening, conflict-management, and defense-reducing skills described in Chapters 7, 11, and 12.

It's not always easy to manage emotions, especially when you're feeling fearful, stressed, angry, or defensive. Nevertheless, doing the work of emotional labor is often vital for success on the job.

Unfortunately, as discussed in Chapter 1, online disinhibition can also encourage emotional outbursts and tirades. This kind of venting can be hazardous to interpersonal relations, and it probably won't make you feel better (see the Focus on Research box on page 233).

Social media can also feed emotional responses. For instance, regularly checking a romantic partner's Facebook site may spur feelings of jealousy, resulting in relational dissatisfaction (Dainton & Stokes, 2015). Jealousy resulting from social media posts is especially strong when the viewer is already suspicious, and more so for women than men (Muise et al., 2014). And Snapchat can elicit even more jealousy than Facebook, because it's often used for flirting and finding new love interests (Utz et al., 2015).

The bottom line is that both senders and receivers experience emotions more intensely online. It's wise to keep this in mind before hitting "send" on emotionally charged messages and before jumping to conclusions about ambiguous online information.

EMOTIONAL CONTAGION

Emotions can spread from one person to another through a process known as **emotional contagion** (Dasborough et al., 2009). As Daniel Goleman (1995, p. 115) observes, "We catch feelings from one another as though they were some kind of social virus." There is evidence this contagion happens between students and teachers (Bakker, 2005), customers and employees (Jiangang et al., 2011), and husbands and wives (Randall et al., 2013). You can probably recall instances in which being around a calm person left you feeling more at peace, or when your previously sunny mood was spoiled by contact with a grouch. That's the power of emotional contagion.

This process can take place online as well as in person. In an analysis of millions of status updates on Facebook, researchers found that posts about rain—which typically correlate with negative moods—can have a ripple effect on readers (Coviello et al., 2014). Those exposed to their friends' rainy-day messages began posting more emotionally negative updates, even if it wasn't raining in their area. The good news is that positive posts are contagious too—at even greater rates. The researchers found that every positive status update led to 1.75 new positive posts by followers. Twitter updates can have similar effects (Ferrara & Yang, 2015). It's important to recognize that communicating your emotional state—even online with people who may not know you well—can have an impact on the feelings and moods of others. And if checking others' posts leaves you feeling anxious and depressed (Lin et al., 2016), it might be a good time to take a break from social media.

DARK SIDE OF COMMUNICATION

Fictional Characters, Real Feelings: Parasocial Relationships

The Season 7 premiere of *The Walking Dead* depicted grisly killings of two key characters. *TV Guide* said the deaths "left fans traumatized" (Mathews, 2016), and the Twittersphere agreed:

"My heart broke in a million pieces"
"It has been a very depressing and emotional night"
"Sorry boss, I can't come in to work—I've had two deaths in the family"

Comments like these illustrate that viewers can grow to care deeply about characters in TV, films, and other media. Scholars use the term *parasocial relationships* to describe enduring, one-sided bonds that fans develop as they follow media characters (Rosaen & Dibble, 2016).

There are virtues in having emotional reactions to what happens even to fictional characters. These reactions demonstrate that viewers aren't heartless; that they have empathy and compassion. Shared emotions can also create a sense of community among fans of a show, many of whom commiserate together on social media. And of course, a TV series must be compelling to evoke such strong responses from its viewers.

Virtues notwithstanding, there's a point when being emotionally wrapped up in the lives of fictional characters becomes a problem. This one-sided sense of intimacy is experienced more intensely by those who are lonely, have social anxiety, and have unmet belonging needs (Greenwood & Long, 2011). In other words, imagined relationships may be a means of compensating for a lack of genuine human connection. And overinvestment in fictional worlds can sap time and energy from everyday life (Bigelsen & Kelley, 2015).

No one is suggesting it's a bad thing to care about fictional characters. But it might be wise to consider whether your emotional needs are being met in authentic relationships.

EXPRESSING EMOTIONS EFFECTIVELY

A wide range of research supports the value of expressing emotions appropriately. Starting at a young age, the way parents talk to their children about emotions has a powerful effect on development. John Gottman and his associates (1997) identified two distinct parenting styles: "emotion coaching" and "emotion dismissing." The research shows how the coaching approach gives children life skills for communicating about feelings, leading to much more satisfying relationships. In fact, children who grow up in families where parents dismiss emotions are at higher risk for behavior problems than those who are raised in families that practice emotion coaching (Young, 2009).

At the most basic physiological level, people who know how to share their feelings appropriately are healthier than those who don't. Inexpressive people—those who avoid their feelings and impulses and deny distress—are more likely to suffer from a host of medical ailments (Quartana & Burns, 2010). However, people who are overly expressive also suffer physiologically. When people lash out, their blood pressure jumps an average of 20 points—in some by as many as 100 (Siegman & Snow, 1997). One key to health, then, is to learn how to express emotions *constructively*.

The suggestions that follow can help you decide when and how to express your emotions. Combined with the guidelines for self-disclosure in Chapter 3, they can improve the effectiveness of your emotional expression.

RECOGNIZE YOUR FEELINGS

Answering the question "How do you feel?" isn't as easy for some people as for others (Peper, 2000). Communication researchers Melanie Booth-Butterfield and Steven Booth-Butterfield (1998; see also Samter & Burleson, 2005) found that some people (whom they term "affectively oriented") are much more aware of their own emotional states. Such affectively oriented people use this awareness when making important decisions. By contrast, people with a low affective orientation are usually unaware of their emotions and tend to regard feelings as useless, unimportant information. The researchers summarize studies showing a relationship between awareness of feelings and a wide range of valuable traits, including positive relationships between parents and children, the ability to comfort others, sensitivity to nonverbal cues, and even skillful use of humor. In other words, being aware of one's feelings is an important ingredient in skillful communication.

Beyond being *aware* of one's feelings, research shows that it's valuable to be able to specifically *identify* one's emotions. Teaching children to recognize and label their emotions ("Are you mad or sad?") is foundational to building their emotional intelligence (David, 2016). College students who could pinpoint the negative emotions they experienced (such as "nervous," "angry," "sad," "ashamed," and "guilty") also had the best

strategies for managing those emotions (Barrett et al., 2001).

As you read earlier in this chapter, there are a number of ways in which feelings become recognizable. Physiological changes can be a clear sign of your emotional state. Monitoring nonverbal behaviors is another excellent way to keep in touch with your feelings. You can also recognize your emotions by monitoring your thoughts as well as the verbal messages you send to others. It's not far from stating "I hate this!" to realizing that you're angry (or bored, nervous, or embarrassed).

Life is an emotional roller coaster for Nadine Byrd (Hailee Steinfeld) in the coming-of-age film *The Edge of Seventeen*. She finds it challenging to manage her emotions and communicate them effectively. ***What role does age play in your ability to identify and express emotions?***

CHOOSE THE BEST LANGUAGE

Most people suffer from impoverished emotional vocabularies. Ask them how they're feeling and the response will almost always include the same terms: *good* or *bad*, *terrible* or *great*, and so on. Take a moment now and see how many feelings you can write down. After you've done your best, look at Table 8.1 on page 240 and see which ones you've missed from this admittedly incomplete list.

Many communicators think they are expressing feelings when, in fact, their statements are emotionally counterfeit. For example, it sounds emotionally revealing to say "I feel like going to a show" or "I feel we've been seeing too much of each other." But in fact, neither of these statements has any emotional content. In the first sentence, the word *feel* really stands for an intention: "I *want* to go to a show." In the second sentence, the "feeling" is really a thought: "I *think* we've been seeing too much of each other." You can recognize the absence of emotion in each case by adding a genuine word of feeling to it. For instance, "I'm *bored* and I want to go to a show" or "I think we've been seeing too much of each other and I feel *confined*."

Relying on a small vocabulary of feelings is as limiting as using only a few terms to describe colors. To say that the ocean in all its moods, the sky as it varies from day to day, and the color of your true love's eyes are all "blue" only tells a fraction of the story. Likewise, it's overly broad to use a term such as *good* or *great* to describe how you feel in situations as different as earning a high grade, finishing a marathon, and hearing the words "I love you" from a special person. Bradberry (2015) found that one sign of emotional intelligence is having a "robust emotional vocabulary":

> While many people might describe themselves as simply feeling "bad," emotionally intelligent people can pinpoint whether they feel

TABLE 8.1 Descriptive Terms for Emotions

Affectionate	Foolish	Preoccupied
Afraid	Forlorn	Pressured
Aggravated	Frustrated	Quiet
Amazed	Furious	Regretful
Ambivalent	Glad	Relieved
Angry	Glum	Remorseful
Annoyed	Grateful	Repulsed
Anxious	Guilty	Resentful
Apathetic	Happy	Restless
Ashamed	Hateful	Sad
Bashful	Helpless	Secure
Bewildered	Hopeful	Sentimental
Bored	Hopeless	Sexy
Calm	Horrible	Shaky
Comfortable	Hurt	Shocked
Concerned	Hyper	Shy
Confident	Impatient	Silly
Confused	Inhibited	Smug
Content	Insecure	Sorry
Curious	Irritable	Stubborn
Defensive	Isolated	Stupid
Delighted	Jealous	Subdued
Depressed	Joyful	Surprised
Desperate	Lazy	Suspicious
Detached	Lonely	Sympathetic
Devastated	Lovestruck	Tense
Disappointed	Loving	Terrified
Disgusted	Mad	Tired
Disturbed	Mean	Touchy
Eager	Melancholy	Trapped
Ecstatic	Miserable	Uneasy
Edgy	Mortified	Unsure
Elated	Nervous	Useless
Embarrassed	Overwhelmed	Vulnerable
Empty	Passionate	Wacky
Enthusiastic	Peaceful	Warm
Excited	Pessimistic	Weak
Exhausted	Playful	Weary
Exhilarated	Pleased	Worried
Fidgety	Possessive	Zany

"irritable," "frustrated," "downtrodden," or "anxious." The more specific your word choice, the better insight you have into exactly how you are feeling, what caused it, and what you should do about it.

There are several ways to express a feeling verbally:

- Through *single words:* "I'm angry" (or "excited," "depressed," "curious," and so on).
- By describing *what's happening to you metaphorically:* "My stomach is tied in knots"; "I'm on top of the world."
- By describing *what you'd like to do:* "I want to run away"; "I'd like to give you a hug."

Finally, you can improve emotional expression by making it clear that your feeling is centered on a specific set of circumstances rather than the whole relationship. Instead of saying "I resent you," say "I get resentful when you don't keep your promises." Rather than "I'm bored with you," say "I get bored when you talk about money."

SHARE MULTIPLE FEELINGS

Many times the feeling you express isn't the only one you're experiencing. For example, you might often express your anger but overlook the confusion, disappointment, frustration, sadness, or embarrassment that preceded or accompanies it. To understand the importance of expressing multiple emotions, consider the following examples. For each one, ask yourself two questions: How would I feel? What feelings might I express?

- An out-of-town friend has promised to arrive at your house at six o'clock. When your guest hasn't arrived by nine o'clock, you are convinced that a terrible accident has occurred. Just as you pick up the phone to call the police and local hospitals, your friend breezes in the door with an offhand remark about getting a late start.
- A friend has posted a photo of you online, along with a positive message. On one hand, you're flattered by the display of affection. On the other hand, it's a picture that doesn't paint you in the best light. You wish the friend had asked first.

In situations such as these you would probably feel several emotions. Consider the case of the overdue friend. Your first reaction to his arrival would probably be relief—"Thank goodness, he's safe!" But you would also be likely to feel anger—"Why didn't he text or call to tell me he'd be late?" The second example would probably leave you feeling pleased, embarrassed, and angry—all at the same time.

Despite it being commonplace to experience several emotions at the same time (Carofiglio et al., 2008), we often communicate only one feeling—usually, the most negative one. In both of the preceding examples you might show only your anger, leaving the other person with little idea of

It's common to experience more than one emotion at the same time. ***Recall an important time when you felt multiple emotions. What value would have been added if you had shared them all?***

the full range of your feelings. Consider the different reaction you would get by describing *all* your emotions in such situations.

RECOGNIZE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FEELING AND ACTING

Just because you feel a certain way doesn't mean you must always act on it. In fact, there is compelling evidence that people who act out angry feelings—even by hitting an inanimate punching bag—actually feel worse than those who experience anger without lashing out (Bushman et al., 1999; Lerner, 2005). Posting your frustration on online "rant sites" doesn't help, either (Martin et al., 2013). More to the point of this book, researchers have discovered that people who deal with negative feelings by venting them indiscriminately have above-average levels of anxiety in their interpersonal relationships (Jerome & Liss, 2005).

Getting in touch with certain emotions does not commit you to a course of action, but it can help you decide how best to act. If, for instance, you think, "I'm so nervous about the interview that I want to cancel it and pretend that I'm sick," it becomes possible to explore why you feel so anxious and then work to remedy the problem. Pretending that nothing is the matter, on the other hand, will do nothing to diminish your anxiety, which can then block your chances for success.

ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR FEELINGS

People don't *make us* like or dislike them, and believing that they do denies the responsibility each of us has for our own emotions. It's important to make sure that your emotional expressions don't blame others for the way you feel (Bippus & Young, 2005; Oatley, 2010). The "I" language described in Chapter 5 makes it clear that you own your feelings. For example, instead of saying "You're making me angry," it's more accurate to say, "I'm feeling angry." Instead of "You hurt my feelings," a more responsible statement is, "I feel hurt when you do that."

CHOOSE THE BEST TIME AND PLACE TO EXPRESS YOUR FEELINGS

Often the first flush of a strong feeling is not the best time to speak out. If you're awakened by the racket caused by a noisy neighbor, storming over to complain might result in your saying things you'll regret later. In such a case, it's probably wiser to wait until you have thought out carefully how you might express your feelings in a way that would be most likely to be heard.

Even after you've waited for your initial emotion to subside, it's still important to choose the time that's best suited to the message. Being rushed or tired or disturbed by some other matter is probably a good reason for postponing the expression of your feeling. In the same manner, you ought to be sure that the recipient of your message is ready to hear you out before you begin. Sometimes that means checking the other person's

ASSESSING YOUR COMMUNICATION

Your Emotional Intelligence

To what extent is each of the following items true for you? Rate each one on a scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 = "very seldom true of me" and 5 = "very often true of me."

_____ **1.** It's hard for me to understand my feelings.

_____ **2.** I have trouble understanding how others feel.

_____ **3.** I don't fantasize or daydream.

_____ **4.** I find it hard to control my impulses.

_____ **5.** I have difficulty expressing my feelings.

_____ **6.** I'm good at understanding how others feel.

_____ **7.** When I'm in a difficult situation, I collect information.

_____ **8.** I tend to be impatient.

_____ **9.** It's hard for me to describe my feelings.

_____ **10.** I'm sensitive to others' feelings.

_____ **11.** I stop and think before solving problems.

_____ **12.** I find it hard to control my anxiety.

This assessment, based on adaptations of 12 of the 35 items of the original measure, is from Parker, J. A., Keefer, K. V., & Wood, L. M. (2011). Toward a brief multidimensional assessment of emotional intelligence: Psychometric properties of the Emotional Quotient Inventory–Short Form. *Psychological Assessment, 23,* 762–777.

For scoring information, see page 257 at the end of the chapter.

mood before you start sharing emotions. In other cases, it's about calculating whether that person is ready to hear sentiments such as "I love you." But don't put off expressing emotions too long. It turns out that the old adage, "Never go to bed angry," has scientific validity (Hicks & Diamond, 2011). Interpersonal conflict between couples that's left unresolved overnight leads to poor sleep patterns, which can cause a variety of health problems.

There are also cases in which you may choose never to express your feelings. Even if you're dying to tell an instructor that her lectures leave you bored to a stupor, you might decide it's best to answer her question "How's class going?" with an innocuous "Okay." And even though you may be irritated by an arrogant police officer who stops you for speeding, the smartest approach might be to keep your feelings to yourself.

When you experience strong emotions but don't want to share them verbally (for whatever reason), writing out your feelings and thoughts has been shown to have mental, physical, and emotional benefits (Burton & King, 2008; Pennebaker, 2004). Putting your feelings into words—even if no one reads them—has therapeutic value (Wilson, 2011). This demonstrates once again the link between emotions and communication. The cognitive process of turning feelings into language helps manage the emotions.

MANAGING EMOTIONS

The preceding section described how to express your emotions constructively. But there will probably be times when you decide it's best to keep your feelings to yourself. For example, imagine that during class your professor makes an offhand comment that leaves you feeling embarrassed. You might not be comfortable saying "That hurt my feelings." Likewise, in a job interview, you probably wouldn't do yourself any favors by confessing your nervousness.

The following sections describe how to manage your emotions *intrapersonally*—that is, through your own thought process. The starting point is learning to differentiate beneficial emotions from the less helpful kind.

FACILITATIVE AND DEBILITATIVE EMOTIONS

Not all emotions are beneficial. For instance, depression, terror, and irrational guilt do little to help you feel better or improve your relationships. It's important to distinguish **facilitative emotions**, which contribute to effective functioning, from **debilitative emotions**, which hinder or prevent effective performance. Positive emotions such as joy and love are obviously facilitative. Much of the time, emotions such as anger or fear are debilitative.

Some unpleasant emotions can be useful if they aren't too intense. For instance, a certain amount of anger or irritation can be constructive if it motivates you to make a bad situation better. But when anger turns to rage, things usually turn out badly. The same is true for fear. A little bit of nervousness before a job interview may boost you just enough to improve your performance (mellow athletes or actors usually don't do well), but a job candidate who is inordinately anxious isn't likely to impress potential employers (Ayres & Crosby, 1995). One big difference, then, between facilitative and debilitative emotions is their *intensity*.

A second characteristic of debilitative feelings is their extended *duration*. Feeling sad after the breakup of a relationship or the loss of a job is to be expected. Yet spending the rest of one's life grieving over the loss accomplishes nothing. In the same way, staying angry at someone for a wrong inflicted long ago can be just as punishing to the grudge holder as to the wrongdoer (Bushman et al., 2005). Social scientists call this **rumination**—recurrent thoughts not demanded by the immediate environment. A substantial body of research confirms that rumination increases feelings of sadness, anxiety,

and depression and makes them last longer (Verduyn & Lavrijsen, 2015). Jealousy and rumination are a particularly bad mix (Elphinston et al., 2013), often leading to unhealthy relational behaviors such as surveillance and stalking.

William Shakespeare wrote, "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." ***How do your thoughts shape your emotions? How do your emotions shape your communication?***

THOUGHTS CAUSE FEELINGS

How can you minimize debilitative feelings? One way is known as the *rational-emotive* approach (Ellis & Ellis, 2014). This method is based on the idea that the key to changing feelings is to change unproductive cognitive interpretations.

Emotions might seem to have a life of their own. People wish they could feel calm when approaching strangers, yet their voices quiver. They try to appear confident when asking for a raise, but their eyes twitch nervously. Many people would say that the strangers or the boss *makes* them feel nervous, just as they would say that a bee sting causes them to feel pain:

Activating Event	→	**Consequence**
bee sting	→	physical pain
meeting strangers	→	nervous feelings

When looking at emotions in this way, people may believe they have little control over how they feel. However, the causal relationship between activating events and emotional discomfort (or pleasure) isn't as great as it seems. Cognitive psychologists and therapists argue that it is not events, such as meeting strangers or being jilted by a lover, that cause people to feel poorly but rather the *beliefs they hold* about these events.

Consider this example to understand how thoughts cause feelings. Imagine you start receiving a string of angry, insulting messages from a friend. Under the circumstances, it's likely that you would feel hurt and upset. Now imagine that, after receiving the offensive messages, you learn that your friend had been hospitalized for mental illness. In this case, your reaction would probably be quite different. Most likely, you'd feel sorrow and compassion, and possibly embarrassment for ever imagining a good friend would turn against you so quickly and for no apparent reason.

In this story, the activating event—being called names—was the same in both cases, yet the emotional consequences were very different. The reason for different feelings has to do with the pattern of thinking in each case. In the first instance, you would most likely think that your friend was angry with you and that you must have done something terrible to deserve such a response. In the second case, you would probably feel sympathetic given that your friend had experienced some psychological difficulty.

This example illustrates that people's *interpretations* of events determine their feelings:

Activating Event	→	**Thought or Belief**	→	**Consequences**
being called names	→	"I've done something wrong."	→	hurt, upset
being called names	→	"My friend must be sick."	→	pity, sympathy

The same principle applies in more common situations. For example, the words "I love you" can be interpreted in a variety of ways. They could be taken at face value as a genuine expression of deep affection. They might also be decoded in a variety of other ways: for example, as an attempt at manipulation; a sincere but mistaken declaration uttered in a moment of passion; or an attempt to make the recipient feel better. It's easy to imagine how different interpretations of a statement such as "I love you" can lead to different emotional reactions:

Event	→	**Thought**	→	**Feeling**
hearing "I love you"	→	"This is a genuine statement."	→	delight (perhaps)
hearing "I love you"	→	"She's (he's) just saying this to manipulate me."	→	anger

The key, then, to understanding and changing feelings lies in reappraising the event. This takes place through a form of intrapersonal communication professionals label **self-talk** (Fernyhough, 2016; Van Raalte et al., 2016)—the nonvocal, internal monologue that is our process of thinking. To understand how self-talk works, pay attention to the part of you that, like a little voice, whispers in your ear. Take a moment now and listen to what the voice is saying.

Did you hear the voice? It was quite possibly saying "What little voice? I don't hear any voices!" This little voice talks to you almost constantly:

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"I wonder when he's going to stop talking."
"I'd better get moving or I'm going to be late."
"How rude of her to cut in line!"

At work or at play, while browsing the web or brushing our teeth, we all tend to talk to ourselves. This thinking voice rarely stops. It may fall silent for a while when you're meditating or concentrating on a task, but most of the time it rattles on. Let's look now at how that voice sometimes processes thoughts in ways that need reappraising.

Irrational thinking can lead to personal and interpersonal difficulties. ***Which fallacies described in this section affect your emotional state? How might you think more rationally?***

IRRATIONAL THINKING AND DEBILITATIVE EMOTIONS

This process of self-talk is essential to understanding the debilitative feelings that interfere with effective communication (E. D. Cohen, 2007). Many debilitative feelings come from accepting a number of irrational thoughts—we call them *fallacies* here—that lead to illogical conclusions and, in turn, to debilitating feelings (Samar et al., 2013). We usually aren't aware of these thoughts, which makes them especially powerful.

The Fallacy of Perfection

People who accept the **fallacy of perfection** believe that a worthwhile communicator should be able to handle any situation with complete confidence and skill. Although such a standard of perfection can serve as a goal and a source of inspiration (rather like making a hole in one for a golfer), it's unrealistic to expect that you can reach or maintain this level of behavior. The truth is, people simply aren't perfect.

People who believe that it's desirable and possible to be a perfect communicator come to think that people won't appreciate them if they are imperfect. Admitting mistakes, saying "I don't know," or sharing feelings of uncertainty or discomfort thus seem to be social defects. But we know that's not accurate, because most of us don't like being around know-it-alls who never acknowledge they're fallible.

You become more liberated each time you comfortably accept the idea that you are not perfect. Saying to yourself, "I made a mistake—I'm a failure" will likely lead to debilitative emotions. Replacing that with, "I made a mistake—I guess I'm human, and I learned something from it" is far more facilitating.

The Fallacy of Approval

Another mistaken belief is based on the idea that it is vital—not just desirable—to obtain everyone's approval. Communicators who subscribe to the **fallacy of approval** go to incredible lengths to seek acceptance from others, even to the extent of sacrificing their own principles and happiness. Adherence to this irrational myth can lead to some ludicrous situations, such as feeling nervous because people you really don't like seem to disapprove of you, or feeling apologetic when you are not at fault.

Consider how some self-talk is rooted in the fallacy of approval, and how realistic alternatives can lead to more facilitative emotions:

Fallacious approval seeking:

"If I speak up about those racist jokes, they probably will think I'm hung up on political correctness."

Rational:

"I hope they won't think I'm overly P.C. But I'd rather speak up than compromise my beliefs."

Fallacious approval seeking:

"If I confront my teammate about not doing his share, he'll probably get defensive."

Rational:

"There's a chance my teammate will get defensive—but I'd rather deal with that than keep quiet and feel resentful."

Don't misunderstand: Abandoning the fallacy of approval doesn't mean living a life of selfishness. It's still important to consider the needs of others. It's also pleasant—one might even say necessary—to strive for the respect of certain people. The point is that if you must abandon your own needs and principles to gain this acceptance, the price is too high.

The Fallacy of Should

One source of unhappiness is the inability to distinguish between what *is* and what *should be*, or the **fallacy of should**. For instance, imagine a person who is full of complaints about the world:

"There should be no rain on weekends."
"Money should grow on trees."
"We should all be able to fly."

Beliefs like these are obviously foolish. But we hold those kinds of expectations for others all the time:

"He shouldn't be so inconsiderate."
"She should stand up for herself."
"They should work harder."

We also hold expectations for ourselves. Read these aloud and consider how you *feel* about them (your tone of voice will give you a clue):

"I should be more outgoing."
"I should be nicer to my family."
"I should be a better team player."

Even when they're true, "shoulds" generate a lot of emotional baggage. Rather than expecting others to behave the way you think they should and feeling disappointed when they don't meet that standard, it's more realistic to think, "I *wish* she (he) would behave the way I want—but maybe I'm being unrealistic to expect better behavior."

The same principle applies to self-imposed resolutions: They can be unrealistic and create more problems than they solve. It can be more productive to set goals rather than dwell on self-criticism. Consider these alternatives to the list above:

"I wish I were more extroverted, but I'm not. I will do the best I can without being a phony."
"I'm going to start being nicer to my family."
"I'll resist being selfish and work on being a better team player."

The Fallacy of Overgeneralization

The **fallacy of overgeneralization** occurs when a person bases a belief on a *limited amount of evidence*. Consider the following statements:

"I blanked during that speech. I'm so stupid!"
"Some friend I am! I forgot my best friend's birthday."

These examples focus on a single shortcoming as if it represents everything. It's more rational and less punishing to avoid overgeneralizing. A single memory lapse can be the exception rather than the rule, and forgetting one event doesn't make you a bad friend.

A second, related category of overgeneralization occurs when we *exaggerate shortcomings:*

"She *never* listens to me."
"He's *always* criticizing me."
"I can't think of *anything*."

On closer examination, such absolute statements are almost always false and usually lead to discouragement or anger. It's better to replace overgeneralizations with more accurate messages, which are likely to generate less negative feelings:

"She sometimes doesn't hear me out."
"He's been critical three times I can remember this week."
"I haven't had any ideas I like today."

The Fallacy of Causation

People who live their lives in accordance with the **fallacy of causation** believe they should do nothing that can hurt or in any way inconvenience others because it will cause undesirable feelings. For example, you might not tell your family members that they've interrupted you several times because you don't want to make them angry. Similarly, it might be tempting to avoid bringing up issues with friends and coworkers because you don't want to cause a negative reaction.

A reluctance to speak out in such situations often results from assuming that one person can cause another's emotions—that others, for example, are responsible for your feeling disappointed, confused, or irritated; or that you are responsible for others feeling hurt, angry, or upset. Actually, this assumption is incorrect. We may *act* in provocative ways, but each person is responsible for the way he or she *reacts*.

In the same way, it's not accurate to say that people *make* you angry, upset, or even happy. Behavior that upsets or pleases one person might not

bring out any reaction from another. If you doubt this fact, think about people you know who respond differently to the same behaviors that you find so bothersome. (You may scream "Idiot!" when you're driving and someone switches lanes in front of you without signaling, whereas the person with you in the car may not even notice or may notice but not care.) The contrast between others' reactions and yours shows that responses are determined more by our own temperament and thinking than by others' behavior.

One way to avoid the debilitative feelings that often accompany the fallacy of causation is to use responsible language, as discussed in Chapter 5. Instead of saying "He makes me so angry," reframe it as your reaction to the other person's behavior: "I don't like when he talks about me behind my back." Instead of saying, "I *had to* visit my parents this weekend; they gave me no option," take responsibility for your choices: "I decided to visit my parents this weekend, but I may choose differently next time." Taking ownership for your actions and reactions can often lead to a sense of empowerment.

The Fallacy of Helplessness

The **fallacy of helplessness** suggests that forces beyond our control determine satisfaction in life. People with this outlook continually see themselves as victims:

"There's no way I can get ahead in this society. The best thing I can do is to accept it."
"I was born with a shy personality. I'd like to be more outgoing, but there's nothing I can do about that."
"I can't tell my boss that she is putting too many demands on me. If I did, I might lose my job."

The error in such statements becomes apparent once you realize that few paths are completely closed. Many difficulties a person claims can't be solved do have solutions; the task is to discover those solutions and to work diligently at applying them. Changing your self-talk can help you see some of those choices and feel more positive about pursuing them:

"It's an uphill battle in this society, but I will do my best to bring about change."
"I tend to be shy around strangers, but I'm going to introduce myself to someone I don't know at tonight's party."
"It won't be pleasant to confront my boss, but I can do it."

Even if you simply change "I *can't* tell my boss" to "I *won't* tell my boss," you'll at least be aware of the choice you're making and probably feel less helpless.

Subscribing to the fallacy of helplessness can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. ***Do you ever mistakenly believe that it's beyond your control to change unsatisfying relationships? How might you dispute this belief and take charge of the situation?***

The Fallacy of Catastrophic Expectations

Some fearful people operate on the assumption that if something bad can happen, it probably will. This is the **fallacy of catastrophic expectations**—a position similar to Murphy's Law. These statements are typical of such an attitude:

"If I invite them to the party, they probably won't want to come."
"If I speak up to try to resolve a conflict, things will probably get worse."
"If I apply for the job I want, I probably won't be hired."
"If I tell them how I really feel, they'll probably just laugh at me."

Once you start imagining terrible consequences, a self-fulfilling prophecy can be set in motion. One study revealed that people who believed that their romantic partners would not change for the better were likely to behave in ways that contributed to the breakup of the relationship (Metts & Cupach, 1990). And people who have a "pessimism bias" often perceive threats in their relationships that are not apparent to outsiders, leading to relational dissatisfaction (Knobloch et al., 2007). If this is a fallacy that plagues you, it's best to shift your internal language from "I fear the worst" to "I'll hope for the best."

Although it's easy to understand the personal benefits of reducing debilitative emotions, it's important to remember the *interpersonal* reasons for doing so. Simply put, relationships function better when the people involved manage their emotions (English et al., 2013; Knobloch & Metts, 2013). This obviously doesn't mean stifling feelings—quite the contrary. Emotion management involves self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and the kind of reappraisal we're about to discuss. Communicators who manage their emotions are able to express them in productive ways with their partners, and that helps maintain relationships. With that in mind, we look at how to reduce debilitative emotions that are generally counterproductive to personal and interpersonal health.

MINIMIZING DEBILITATIVE EMOTIONS

Now you're ready to put into practice the rational-emotive process and self-talk. When practiced conscientiously, they can help you cut down on the self-defeating thinking that leads to many debilitative emotions.

Monitor Your Emotional Reactions

The first step is to recognize when you're having debilitative emotions. As we suggested earlier, one way to notice feelings is through physical stimuli: butterflies in the stomach, racing heart, sweating, and so on. Although such reactions might be symptoms of food poisoning, more often they reflect a strong emotion. You also can recognize certain ways of behaving that suggest your feelings: stomping instead of walking normally, being unusually quiet, and speaking in a sarcastic tone of voice are some examples.

It may seem strange to suggest that it's necessary to look for emotions—they ought to be immediately apparent. However, the fact is that we often suffer from debilitative feelings for some time without noticing them. For example, at the end of a trying day, you've probably caught yourself frowning and realized that you've been wearing that face for some time without knowing it.

Remember the two key characteristics of debilitating emotions—intensity (they are *too* intense) and duration (they last *too* long)—and use those to guide your assessment.

Note the Activating Event

Once you're aware of how you're feeling, the next step is to figure out what activating event triggered your response. Sometimes it is obvious. If your romantic partner keeps calling you by the name of a former lover, you're likely to become upset. Research shows that dating couples can develop "social allergies" to each other, becoming hypersensitive about

FOCUS ON RESEARCH

When Talking About Feelings Makes Things Worse

Cancer patients and their partners are typically coached to talk about their feelings—openly, honestly, and regularly. The assumption is that disclosing difficult emotions with loved ones is always good for all parties involved. Communication scholar Daena Goldsmith believes such prescriptions may be unduly influenced by an "ideology of openness" (Goldsmith & Domann-Scholz, 2013). She and colleague Gregory Miller interviewed couples coping with cancer to learn more about their communication patterns—and what the partners found helpful.

Contrary to popular advice, participants who regularly talked about feelings reported *more* distress and *poorer* quality of life and functioning. This was particularly true for partners in differing emotional states (e.g., one worried, one calm) or with differing communication styles (one expressive, one reserved). Couples said that sometimes the best way to manage their emotions was to focus instead on discussing facts, solving problems, or engaging in humor. In other words, diversion can trump disclosure when emotions run high.

The researchers believe that communicators in challenging situations need a more nuanced prescription than simply "open up and share your feelings." Their approach is consistent with that of Chapter 1: Competent communication requires adaptability and flexibility.

Goldsmith, D. J., & Miller, G. A. (2015). Should I tell you how I feel? A mixed method analysis of couples' talk about cancer. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 43,* 273–293.

their partner's annoying behaviors (Cunningham et al., 2005). In these cases, it's easy to identify what triggers a given response. In other cases, however, the activating event isn't so apparent.

Sometimes there isn't a single activating event but rather a series of small incidents that finally build toward a critical mass and trigger a debilitative feeling. This sort of thing happens when someone teases you over and over about the same thing, or when you suffer a series of small disappointments.

The best way to begin tracking down activating events is to notice the circumstances in which you have debilitative feelings. Perhaps they occur when you're around *specific people*. For example, you may feel tense or angry every time you encounter a person with whom you have struggled in the past. Until those issues are dealt with, feelings about past events can trigger debilitative emotions, even in apparently innocuous situations.

In other cases, you might discover that being around certain *types of individuals* triggers debilitative emotions. For instance, you might become nervous around people who seem more intelligent or self-confident than you are. In other cases, certain *settings* can stimulate unpleasant emotions: parties, work, school. Sometimes the *topic of conversation* is the factor that sets you off, whether politics, religion, sex, or some other subject.

Record Your Self-Talk

This is the point at which you analyze the thoughts that are the link between the activating event and your feelings. If you're serious about getting

rid of debilitative emotions, it's important to actually write down your self-talk when first learning to use this method. Putting your thoughts on paper will help you see whether they make any sense.

Monitoring your self-talk might be difficult at first. This is a new skill, and any new activity seems awkward. If you persevere, however, you'll find you will be able to identify the thoughts that lead to your debilitative feelings. Once you get in the habit of recognizing this internal monologue, you'll be able to identify your thoughts quickly and easily.

Dispute Your Irrational Beliefs

Now is the time to engage in the reappraisal process mentioned earlier in this chapter (page 231). Use the discussion of irrational fallacies on pages 247–251 to find out which of your internal statements are based on mistaken thinking. You can do this most effectively by following three steps. First, decide whether each belief you've recorded is rational or irrational. Next, explain why the belief does or doesn't make sense. Finally, if the belief is irrational, consider an alternative way of thinking that is more sensible and that can leave you feeling better when faced with the same activating event in the future.

Change Your Self-Talk

Once you've disputed your irrational beliefs, it's time to change your intrapersonal language accordingly. Replace words in your self-talk such as "can't," "have to," and "should" with words like "will," "want to," and "choose to." For example:

Instead of saying "I can't make small talk with strangers," say "I will ask more questions with strangers."

Instead of saying "I have to be polite to rude customers," say "I choose to be polite because it's better than the other options."

Instead of saying "I should be less defensive," say "I want to be less defensive, so I'm going to work on it."

Some researchers (Kross & Ayduk, 2011) suggest that self-talk is most effective when it's stated in the second person: addressing yourself as "you" instead of "I." It's almost as if you're coaching yourself. For example,

> "Jennifer, what are you nervous about? It's not the first date you've ever been on. I know you like this guy, but take it slow, and stay calm. Even if it doesn't go perfectly, it won't be the end of the world. You're capable, intelligent, accomplished, beautiful. Just do your best and let the chips fall. Chill, Jen." (Weintraub, 2015)

After reading about this method for dealing with unpleasant emotions, some readers have objections:

"*This rational-emotive approach sounds like nothing more than trying to talk yourself out of feeling bad*." This accusation is totally correct. After all, because we talk ourselves into feeling bad, what's wrong with talking ourselves out of bad feelings, especially when they are based on irrational thoughts?

Media Clip

Self-Talk and Resilience: *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*

In what is admittedly dark material for a comedy, Kimmy Schmidt (Ellie Kemper) starts a new life in New York City after escaping from a bunker where she was held captive for 15 years. She hasn't been part of civilization since the 1990s, so she has lots of catching up to do.

Although the premise is far-fetched, Kimmy's mindset and communication are admirable. She's "unbreakable" because she's brimming with confidence and optimism. Kimmy may have felt doomed in the past, but she's determined to create a bright future. Her language is peppered with Kimmyisms such as "Smile until you feel better" and "Just take everything ten seconds at a time and it will be okay." When she has self-doubts, she talks herself out of them. Her upbeat attitude is infectious as it brightens the lives of everyone she encounters.

Kimmy's character is a fun reminder that moving forward in life often begins by changing one's walk and talk; positive emotions will follow.

"The kind of disputing we just read sounds phony and unnatural. I don't talk to myself in sentences and paragraphs." There's no need to dispute your irrational beliefs in any special literary style. You can be just as colloquial as you want. The important thing is to clearly understand what thoughts led you into your debilitative feeling so you can clearly reappraise them. When the technique is new to you, it's a good idea to write or talk out your thoughts to make them clear. After you've had some practice, you'll be able to do these steps in a quicker, less formal way.

"This approach is too cold and impersonal. It seems to aim at turning people into calculating, emotionless machines." This is simply not true. A rational thinker can still dream, hope, and love—there's nothing necessarily irrational about feelings like these. Put another way, communicators can use both their heads and their hearts when making decisions (Fetterman & Robinson, 2013). We discuss accentuating positive emotions in the following section.

"This technique promises too much. There's no chance I could rid myself of all unpleasant feelings, however nice that might be." We can answer this by assuring you that rational-emotive thinking won't make all your debilitative feelings go away. What it can do is reduce their number, intensity, and duration.

MAXIMIZING FACILITATIVE EMOTIONS

Reducing debilitative emotions is only part of the emotional health equation. Contemporary scholars maintain that fostering positive emotions is just as important as minimizing negative ones. Whether it's called "learned optimism" (Seligman, 2006) or "positivity" (Fredrickson, 2009), the approach is similar to what's outlined in this section. If thoughts cause feelings, then positive thoughts can cause positive feelings. Ruminating on the good rather than the bad in life can enhance one's emotional, relational, and even physical health (Rius-Ottenheim et al., 2013).

It's unrealistic to think that you'll have a positive emotional response to every event. The key, according to Harvard professor Susan David, is to cultivate what she calls "emotional agility."

> Emotional agility is a skill set that builds on our ability to face our emotions, label them, understand them and then choose to move forward deliberately. It is the ability to recognize when you're feeling stressed, be able to step out of your stress, and then decide how to act in a way that is congruent with your personal values and aligned with your goals. (Semnani, 2016)

Even though you can't dictate all the events of your life, you have the power to reappraise them. Clichés such as "look on the bright side" and "have an attitude of gratitude" may not be comforting when delivered by others, but they can serve as helpful self-reminders. You can regard challenging situations as growth opportunities. You can focus on what you gained rather than what you lost. You can choose compassion over contempt. The difference between "That really hurt me" and "I found out how strong and capable I really am" is often a matter of mindset—and positive emotions follow positive appraisals.

Many people find it easier to focus on their negative emotional experiences. It often takes mindful effort to pay attention to and express pleasurable feelings in close relationships. Here are 10 emotions that research (Fredrickson, 2009) identifies as basic to positivity: *joy*, *gratitude*, *serenity*, *interest*, *hope*, *pride*, *amusement*, *inspiration*, *awe*, and *love*. How many have you experienced recently? How often do you express these emotions to people who matter? Is it possible that you felt but can't recall them? Identifying and then talking or writing about your positive emotional experiences can lead to greater personal and interpersonal satisfaction.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Objective 8.1 Explain how emotions are experienced and expressed.

Emotionally intelligent people are generally more effective communicators. Emotions have several dimensions. They are signaled by internal physiological changes, manifested by verbal and nonverbal reactions, and defined in most cases by cognitive interpretations.

> **Q:** Over the course of this week, keep a journal recording your emotional responses to interactions in an important relationship. In particular, pay attention to how those responses begin internally and then are expressed externally.

Objective 8.2 Describe the various personal and social influences on emotional expression.

There are several reasons why people do not verbalize many of the emotions they feel. Certain personality types respond to emotions more negatively than others. Some cultures encourage while others discourage the expression of emotions. Biological

sex and gender roles also shape the way people experience and express emotions. Many social roles and rules discourage the expression of some feelings, particularly negative ones. Some people express emotions so rarely that they lose the ability to recognize when they are feeling them. Social media may also increase the intensity of emotions for both message senders and receivers. Finally, exposure to others' emotions can shape the way we ourselves feel through the process of emotional contagion.

Q: Nature versus nurture: Analyze the various factors that influence whether and how you express your emotions. To what extent do you think your responses are primarily based on your personality (i.e., nature)? What social and environmental factors (i.e., nurture) shape the way you do or don't express emotions? Give examples to illustrate your analysis.

Objective 8.3 Demonstrate how to express your emotions appropriately and effectively.

Because total expression of feelings is not appropriate for adults, several guidelines help define when and how to share emotions effectively. Self-awareness, clear language, and expression of multiple feelings are important, as is the ability to recognize the difference between feeling and acting. Willingness to accept responsibility for feelings instead of blaming them on others leads to better reactions. Choosing the proper time and place to share feelings is also important.

Q: Assess how effectively you express your emotions. Are you able to identify your feelings and put them into words? How appropriately do you share them with others? How could you apply the guidelines in this chapter to express your emotions more effectively and appropriately?

Objective 8.4 Distinguish between facilitative and debilitative emotions, and explain how reappraisal may be used to manage emotions effectively.

Whereas some emotions are facilitative, meaning they contribute to effective functioning, other debilitative feelings inhibit effective performance. Many of these debilitative emotions are caused by various types of irrational thinking. It is often possible to communicate more confidently and effectively by identifying troublesome emotions, identifying the activating event and self-talk that triggered them, and reappraising any irrational thoughts with a more logical analysis of the situation. It's also important to identify and enjoy facilitative emotions.

Q: Consider the last time you experienced a debilitative emotion associated with an interpersonal relationship. How well were you able to manage it? How might the methods in this chapter help you process emotions such as this one in the future?

KEY TERMS

Debilitative emotions (244)
Emotional contagion (237)
Emotional intelligence (228)
Emotional labor (235)
Facilitative emotions (244)
Fallacy of approval (247)
Fallacy of catastrophic expectations (250)
Fallacy of causation (249)
Fallacy of helplessness (250)
Fallacy of overgeneralization (249)
Fallacy of perfection (247)
Fallacy of should (248)
Reappraisal (231)
Rumination (244)
Self-talk (246)

ACTIVITIES

1. The Assessing Your Communication exercise on page 243 gives you a general sense of your emotional intelligence. Have two or three people who are close to you offer their appraisal using the assessment. Do their evaluations match yours? If not, what do you think explains the difference? What

are some ways you might improve your emotional intelligence?

2. Choose an important emotion you experience in one of your relationships. This relationship needn't be highly personal. You might, for example, focus on an employer, a professor, or a neighbor. Use the guidelines on pages 247–251 to determine whether and how you might express this emotion. Ask someone you know to give you feedback on the choice you made.

3. Explore whether you subscribe to the fallacy of helplessness by completing the following lists. Describe two important (to you) communication-related difficulties you have for each of the following: communicating with family members, people at school or at work, strangers, and friends. Use the following format for each difficulty:

I can't _____.

because _____.

Now read the list aloud to a classmate, but with a slight difference. For each "can't," substitute the word "won't." Note which statements are actually "won'ts." Tell your classmate if you feel differently about this statement when you change the wording.

Read the list to your classmate again, only this time substitute "I don't know how to" for your original "can't." Rewrite any statements that are truly "don't know hows," and decide what you could do to learn the skill that you presently lack. Tell your classmate if you feel differently about this statement when you change the wording.

Based on your experience, decide whether you subscribe to the fallacy of helplessness, and what you could do to eliminate this sort of debilitative thinking.

4. Choose an important situation in which you experience debilitative emotions that interfere with your ability to communicate effectively. With the help of a partner or class group, use the steps on pages 251–254 to reappraise the rationality of your beliefs. Report on how the rational-emotive approach affects your communication in this important situation.

5. For one week, keep a daily journal in which you identify all the positive emotions you experience in your relationships. In particular, watch for these 10 emotions: *joy*, *gratitude*, *serenity*, *interest*, *hope*, *pride*, *amusement*, *inspiration*, *awe*, and *love*.

At the end of the week, reflect on whether your journaling helped you notice and remember positive emotions you might otherwise have missed or forgotten. What strategies can you develop to help you experience and express positive emotions more often?

SCORING FOR ASSESSING YOUR COMMUNICATION (PAGE 243)

Reverse-score items 1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 9, and 12 (i.e., 5 = 1, 4 = 2, 3 = 3, 2 = 4, and 1 = 5).

Add items 1, 5, and 9. This is your score on the intrapersonal dimension of Emotional Intelligence: _____. The average score for young adult men on this dimension is about 10, with most scores between 8 and 12; for young adult women, the average is about 11, with most scores between 9 and 13.

Add items 2, 6, and 10. This is your score on the interpersonal dimension of Emotional Intelligence: _____. The average score for young adult men on this dimension is about 12, with most scores between 10 and 14; for young adult women, the average is about 13, with most scores between 11 and 15.

Add items 3, 7, and 11. This is your score on the adaptability dimension of Emotional Intelligence: _____. The average score for young adult women and men on this dimension is about 12, with most scores between 10 and 14.

Add items 4, 8, and 12. This is your score on the stress management dimension of Emotional Intelligence: _____. The average score for young adult women and men on this dimension is about 9, with most scores between 7 and 11.

9

Dynamics of Interpersonal Relationships

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

9.1 Recognize the various reasons for entering into interpersonal relationships.

9.2 Describe the stages and dialectical tensions typically experienced in interpersonal relationships.

9.3 Identify specific skills communicators can use to maintain and improve their interpersonal relationships.

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"I'm looking for a meaningful relationship."
"Our relationship has changed lately."
"The relationship is good for both of us."
"This relationship isn't working."

RELATIONSHIP is one of those terms people use all the time but have trouble defining. Even scholars who have devoted their careers to studying relationships don't agree on what the term means (Guerrero et al., 2014). Their definitions include words such as "closeness," "influence," "commitment," and "intimacy"—but coming up with a single definition can be (as the old adage goes) like nailing Jell-O to a wall.

In this chapter, we explore some of the general dynamics that characterize interpersonal relationships and the communication that occurs within them. After reading it, you will see that relationships aren't fixed or unchanging. Rather, they can, and often do, change over time. In other words, a relationship is less a *thing* than a *process*. We look at why we form relationships, the dynamics of those relationships, and how to manage them. In Chapter 10, the companion to this chapter, we extend our discussion by focusing on specific relational contexts: close relationships with friends, family, and romantic partners.

WHY WE FORM RELATIONSHIPS

Why do we form relationships with some people and not with others? Sometimes we have no choice: Children can't select their parents, and most workers aren't able to choose their colleagues. In many other cases, however, we seek out some people and actively avoid others.

Social scientists have collected an impressive body of research on interpersonal attraction (e.g., Finkel & Baumeister, 2010; Graziano & Bruce, 2008). The following are some of the factors they have identified that influence our choice of relational partners.

APPEARANCE

Most people claim we should judge others on the basis of how they act, not how they look, but we often do the opposite (Swami & Furnham, 2008). For instance, physical appearance seems to be the primary basis for attraction for speed daters (Luo & Zhang, 2009). These first impressions can influence secondary ones. For example, when photos rated as attractive accompany online profiles, raters appraise the profile text more positively (Brand et al., 2012). Online profile owners are also rated as more attractive when they have pictures of physically attractive friends on their sites (Jaschinski & Kommers, 2012). The opposite is also true: Face images are rated as less attractive when they appear near those rated as unattractive or average (Rodway et al., 2013).

Even if your appearance isn't beautiful by societal standards, consider these facts. First, after initial impressions have passed, ordinary-looking people with pleasing personalities are likely to be judged as attractive (Lewandowski et al., 2007), and perceived beauty can be influenced by traits such as liking, respect, familiarity, and social interaction (Albada et al., 2002; Singh et al., 2009). Second, physical factors become less important as a relationship progresses. In fact, as romantic relationships develop, partners create "positive illusions," viewing one another as more physically attractive over time (Barelds et al., 2011).

"Before the Internet, I just assumed I was the only one, and kept more or less to myself."

SIMILARITY

According to what's known as the *similarity thesis*, perhaps the strongest determinant of relationship formation is similarity to another person (Montoya & Horton, 2013). For example, one study found that similar values about politics and religion are the best predictors of mate choice—significantly more than attraction to physical appearance or personality traits (Alford et al., 2011).

Similarity plays an important role in initial attraction. People are more likely to accept a Facebook friend request from a stranger who is perceived to be similar than from one perceived as different (Martin et al., 2013). The word "perceived" is important in the preceding sentence. Research shows that speed daters are more attracted to similarities they *believe* they have ("We *seem* to have a lot in common") than to actual similarities (Tidwell et al., 2013). This finding demonstrates that attraction based on similarities is a subjective process. In fact, research suggests that deciding you like someone often leads to perceptions of similarity rather than the other way around (Sprecher, 2014).

There are several reasons why similarity is a strong foundation for relationships. First, similarity can be validating. The fact that another person shares your beliefs, tastes, and values is a form of ego support. One study described the lengths to which "implicit egotism" may unconsciously affect perceptions of attractiveness (Jones et al., 2004). Results showed that people are disproportionately likely to marry others whose first or last names resemble their own, and they're also attracted to those with similar birthdays and even with the same sports jersey numbers (see also Simonsohn, 2011).

Second, similarity makes others more predictable and more likely to enjoy the same activities you do, such as going to particular restaurants or concerts. The ability to make confident predictions about others' behavior reduces uncertainty and anxiety (Montoya & Horton, 2013), which leads to greater emotional and relational stability (Cheng & Grühn, 2016).

For more than 50 years, TV and film episodes of *Star Trek* have followed the adventures of the emotional James Kirk and his hyperrational first mate, Spock, illustrating how complementary personalities can lead to rich, satisfying relationships. ***In what ways are any of your close relationships enriched by complementarity?***

There's a third explanation for the similarity thesis. When we learn that other people are similar to us, we may assume they'll probably like us, so we in turn like them. The self-fulfilling prophecy creeps into the picture again.

COMPLEMENTARITY

The old saying "opposites attract" seems to contradict the principle of similarity. In truth, though, both are valid. Differences strengthen a relationship when they are *complementary*—when each partner's characteristics satisfy the other's needs. Research suggests that attraction to partners who have complementary temperaments might be rooted in biology (Fisher, 2007). In addition, some studies show that couples are more likely to be attracted to each other when one partner is dominant and the other passive (Swami & Furnham, 2008). Relationships also work well when the partners agree that one will exercise control in certain areas ("You make the final decisions about money") and the other will take the lead in different ones ("I'll decide how we ought to decorate the place"). Disagreement over control issues, however, can cause strains. One study shows that "spendthrifts and tightwads" are often attracted to each other, but their differences in financial management lead to significant conflict over the course of a relationship (Rick et al., 2011).

Studies that have examined successful and unsuccessful couples over a 20-year period show the interaction between similarities and differences (Klohnen & Luo, 2003). When partners are radically different, the dissimilar qualities that at first appear intriguing later become cause for relational breakups (Amodio & Showers, 2005). Partners in successful marriages were similar enough to satisfy each other physically and mentally, but were different enough to meet each other's needs and keep the relationship interesting. Successful couples find ways to keep a balance between their similarities and differences while adjusting to the changes that occur over the years (Shiota & Levenson, 2007).

REWARDS

Some relationships are based on an economic model called **social exchange theory** (Stafford, 2008; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). This approach suggests that we seek out people who can give us rewards that are greater than or equal to the costs we encounter in dealing with the relationship. Social exchange theorists define rewards as any outcomes we desire. They may be tangible (a nice place to live, a high-paying job) or intangible (prestige, emotional support, companionship). Costs are undesirable outcomes: unpleasant work, emotional pain, and so on. A simple formula captures the social exchange explanation for why we form and maintain relationships:

Rewards – Costs = Outcome

According to social exchange theorists, we use this formula (often unconsciously) to calculate whether a relationship is a "good deal" or "not worth the effort," based on whether the outcome is positive or negative (Frisby et al., 2015).

At its most blatant level, an exchange approach seems cold and calculating, but in some types of relationships it can be quite appropriate. A healthy business relationship is based on how well the parties help one another, and some friendships are based on an informal kind of barter: "I don't mind listening to the ups and downs of your love life, because you rescue me when the house needs repairs." Even close relationships have an element of exchange. Friends and lovers often tolerate each other's quirks because the comfort and enjoyment they get make the less-than-pleasant times worth accepting. However, when one partner feels "underbenefited," it often leads to relational disruption or termination (DeMaris, 2007).

Costs and rewards don't exist in isolation; we define them by comparing a certain situation with alternatives. For example, consider a hypothetical woman, Gloria, who is struggling to decide whether to remain in a relationship with Raymond, her longtime romantic partner. Raymond loves Gloria, but he's not perfect: He has a hair-trigger temper, and he has become verbally abusive from time to time. Also, Gloria knows that Raymond was unfaithful to her at least once. In deciding whether to stay with Raymond, Gloria will use two standards.

The first standard is her **comparison level (CL)**—her minimum standard of what behavior is acceptable. If Gloria believes that relational partners have an obligation to be faithful and treat one another respectfully at all times, then Raymond's behavior will fall below her comparison level. This will be especially true if Gloria has had positive romantic relationships in the past (Merolla et al., 2004). On the other hand, if Gloria adopts a "nobody's perfect" standard, she is more likely to view Raymond's behavior as meeting or exceeding her comparison level.

DARK SIDE OF COMMUNICATION

The Anguish of Abusive Relationships

It would be nice if all our relationships were happy, healthy, and mutually reinforcing. The unfortunate truth, however, is that some relationships become abusive. Abuse can be mental, emotional, verbal, sexual, or physical, and it can leave scars that remain long after the relationship is over.

Many abusive relationships don't end when they should. Why do people stay in them? Social exchange theory offers an explanation (Kreager et al., 2013). Abused partners often believe that a bad relationship is better than no relationship at all. They may also have trouble seeing viable relational alternatives. Perspective gets lost and rationalizations get made—and the pain goes on. Research has shown that people in abusive dating relationships underestimate how unhappy they really are and overestimate how unhappy they would be if the relationship were to end (Arriaga et al., 2013).

Professional help is vital for pulling free from an abusive relationship (*www.healthyplace.com/abuse* offers information and resources). Experts recommend the following:

- *Don't keep abuse a secret.* At the very least, tell a trusted friend or family member what's happening to you—and then ask that person to help you get help.
- *Watch for patterns.* Abuse often happens in cycles. If you're in the upside of a cycle and all is calm, it can be easy to ignore or overlook a previous violation. But if the abuse returns, it probably won't be the last time.
- *Resist self-blame.* Abused people often believe they are at fault for what happened to them, and that somehow they "had it coming." Remember—*no one deserves abuse.*

Gloria also will rate Raymond according to her **comparison level of alternatives (CL_{alt})**. This standard refers to a comparison between the rewards she receives in her present situation and those she could expect to receive in others (Overall & Sibley, 2008). If, for example, Gloria doesn't want to be alone and she thinks, "If I don't have Raymond I won't have anyone," then her CL_{alt} would be lower than her present situation; but if she is confident that she could find a kinder partner, her CL_{alt} would be higher than the status quo. Research suggests that when a sense of connection is lacking in a romantic relationship, the draw of intimacy from romantic alternatives becomes particularly strong (Spielmann et al., 2012).

Social exchange theorists suggest that communicators unconsciously use this calculus to decide whether to form and stay in relationships. At first this information seems to offer little comfort to those who are in unsatisfying relationships, such as when the partner's behavior is below the CL and there are no foreseeable or preferable alternatives (CL_{alt}). But there are choices other than being stuck in situations where the costs outweigh the rewards. First, you might make sure that you are judging your present relationship against a realistic CL. Expecting a situation to be perfect can be a recipe for unhappiness and relational dissatisfaction (Mikkelson et al., 2016). If you decide that your present situation truly falls below your CL, you might explore whether there are other alternatives you haven't considered. And finally, the skills introduced throughout this book may help you negotiate a better relationship with the other person (assuming the relationship isn't abusive—see the Dark Side box on page 263).

COMPETENCY

We like to be around talented people, probably because we hope their skills and abilities will rub off on us. On the other hand, we are uncomfortable around those who are too competent—perhaps because we look bad by comparison. And we're attracted most to competence in others when it's accompanied by a warm rather than cool personality (Fiske et al., 2007).

Elliot Aronson and his associates (2008) demonstrated how competence and imperfection combine to affect attraction. The researchers asked subjects to evaluate recordings of two candidates for a quiz program. One candidate seemed perfect: He answered almost all the questions correctly and modestly admitted that he was an honor student, accomplished athlete, and college yearbook editor. The other candidate was average: He answered fewer questions correctly, had lower grades, was a less successful athlete, and was a lower level member of the yearbook staff. Toward the end of half the recordings, the candidates committed a blunder, spilling coffee all over themselves. The remaining half of the recordings contained no such blunder. These, then, were the four experimental conditions: (1) a person with superior ability who blundered, (2) a person with superior ability who did not blunder, (3) an average person who blundered, and (4) an average person who did not blunder. The ratings of the candidates in these four conditions revealed an interesting and important principle of interpersonal attraction. The person rated as most attractive was the

superior candidate who blundered. Aronson's conclusion was that we like competence—but we also like people who are somewhat flawed because they remind us of ourselves.

PROXIMITY

As common sense suggests, we are likely to develop relationships with people with whom we interact frequently (Flora, 2005). In many cases, proximity leads to liking. For instance, we're more likely to develop friendships with close neighbors—whether near where we live or in adjacent seats in our classrooms (Back et al., 2008)—than with distant ones. Chances are also good that we'll choose a mate with whom we cross paths often. Proximity even has a role in social media, where messaging or chatting can create virtual proximity (Baker, 2008). As one researcher notes, when it comes to social networking sites, cultural proximity outweighs geographic proximity (Rohn, 2014). Facts like these are understandable when we consider that proximity allows us to get more information about other people and benefit from a relationship with them. Also, people in close proximity may be more similar to us—for example, if we live in the same neighborhood, odds are we have the same socioeconomic status.

DISCLOSURE

In Chapter 3, we describe how telling others important information about yourself can help build liking, both in person (Dindia, 2002; Sprecher et al., 2013) and through social media (Ledbetter et al., 2011). Sometimes the basis of this attraction comes from learning about ways we are similar, either in experiences ("I broke off an engagement myself") or in attitudes ("I feel nervous with strangers, too"). Self-disclosure also increases liking because it indicates regard. Sharing private information is a form of respect and trust—a kind of liking that we've already seen increases attractiveness.

Not all disclosure leads to liking. Research shows that the key to satisfying self-disclosure is reciprocity: getting back an

Media Clip

The Power and Peril of Disclosure: *Homeland*

Carrie Mathison (Claire Danes) is in the espionage business. Her job is to protect homeland security by uncovering enemy spies and their plots. It's a scary way to make a living, but Carrie gets a thrill out of living on the edge.

Espionage operatives often use threats or violence to gain intel, but Carrie uses different tactics. She befriends those from whom she wants information, slowly forming relationships with them. She self-discloses and becomes vulnerable, and they lower their defenses and let her into their lives. While this allows Carrie to gain their confidence and learn their secrets, it often leaves her in relational predicaments—because the enemy has become her friend, or even her lover.

Carrie's approach creates ethical dilemmas, but she clearly understands relational basics: Disclosure begets disclosure, trust leads to trust, and both help create interpersonal bonds.

amount and kind of information equivalent to what you reveal (Dindia, 2000a). A second important ingredient in successful self-disclosure is timing. It's probably unwise to talk about your sexual insecurities with a new acquaintance or express your pet peeves to a friend at your birthday party. This is particularly true on social media: Disclosures made privately are perceived as more appropriate and intimate than those made publicly; also, disclosures made publicly reduce liking for the discloser (Bazarova, 2012). Finally, for the sake of self-protection, it's important to reveal personal information only when you are sure the other person is trustworthy (Shirley et al., 2007).

MODELS OF RELATIONAL DYNAMICS

Even the most stable relationships vary from day to day and over longer periods of time. Communication scholars have attempted to describe and explain how communication creates and reflects the changing dynamics of relationships. In this section, we discuss two different characterizations of relational development and interaction.

STAGES OF RELATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

One of the best known models of relational stages was developed by Mark Knapp (Knapp et al., 2014; see also Dunleavy & Booth-Butterfield, 2009; Mongeau & Henningsen, 2008), who broke the waxing and waning of relationships into 10 steps that involve coming together and coming apart. Other researchers have suggested that any model of relational communication ought to contain a third area—**relational maintenance**—aimed at keeping relationships operating smoothly and satisfactorily (we'll discuss relational maintenance in more detail later in this chapter). Figure 9.1 shows how Knapp's 10 stages fit into this three-part view of relational communication. We now explore each stage in detail.

FIGURE 9.1 Stages of Relationship Development

Adapted from Knapp, M. L., Vangelisti, A. L., & Caughlin, J. P. (2014). *Interpersonal communication in human relationships* (7th ed.). Boston: Pearson Education.

Initiating

The goals in the **initiating** stage are to show that you are interested in making contact and to demonstrate that you are a person worth talking to (Sprecher et al., 2008). Communication during this stage is usually brief, and it generally follows conventional formulas: handshakes, remarks about innocuous subjects such as the weather, and friendly expressions. Such behavior may seem superficial and meaningless, but it is a way of signaling that you're interested in building some kind of relationship with the other person. It allows us to say, without saying, "I'm a friendly person, and I'd like to get to know you."

Initiating relationships—especially romantic ones—can be particularly difficult for people who are shy. Social media can make it easier for reticent people to strike up a relationship (Baker & Oswald, 2010). Not only is online initiating easier for some, but it can result in successful relationships. In one survey, more than a third of 19,000 married respondents said their relationship began online (Cacioppo et al., 2013). When compared with marital relationships that began in person, those that started online had slightly higher satisfaction rates and slightly lower incidences of breakups.

Keep in mind that initiating is the opening stage of *all* relationships, not just romantic ones. Friendships start here (Johnson et al., 2004), and so do business partnerships. In fact, some have compared employment interviews to first dates because they have similar properties (Half, 2016). As you read about the stages that follow, consider how the communication involved could be true of landing a job, connecting with a roommate, or joining an organization—as well as forming a romantic relationship.

Experimenting

After making contact with an interesting new person, we generally begin a phase known as **experimenting**, the search for common ground. We usually start with the basics: "Where are you from? What's your major?" From there we look for other similarities: "You're a runner, too? How many miles do you run a week?"

The hallmark of experimenting is small talk. We tolerate the ordeal of small talk because it serves several functions. First, it is a useful way to find out what interests we share with the other person. It also provides a way to "audition" the other person—to help us decide whether a relationship is worth pursuing. In addition, small talk is a safe way to ease into a relationship. You haven't risked much as you decide whether to proceed further.

Scholars have noted, and your experience probably confirms, the importance of social media during the experimenting stage. As Katrina Shonbeck (2011) points out, some basic information gathering is often done quickly online:

> By perusing someone's social networking profile, I can, more often than not, learn many of the same things I'd learn from them during the first couple of dates without the other person being present. From what they disclose on the general information page, I can learn their relationship statuses, political preferences, favorite hobbies, music, books, and movies. By looking through their pictures and their wall, I can get a pretty good sense of the kinds of people they like to hang out with, what they like to do on weekends, their personal styles. (p. 398)

FOCUS ON RESEARCH

Communicating About Relational Baggage

Carrying "relational baggage" can be tough, and disclosing it to a relational partner even tougher. A research team led by communication scholar Brandi Frisby investigated this delicate subject.

Relational baggage is broadly defined as "negative attributes and situations" that people bring with them into subsequent relationships. This includes, but isn't limited to, previous partners (the crazy ex), social networks (the flaky friend), personality characteristics (abnormally jealous), and relational goals (commit or quit). The researchers asked several hundred undergraduates about their experiences with relational baggage.

Most participants readily acknowledged that relational baggage was a source of anxiety in their romantic relationships. Hearing about baggage overtly—through direct disclosure or questions—was generally related to relational satisfaction. On the other hand, learning of it from third-party sources (e.g., a mutual friend or a former partner) had negative effects on relationships.

The researchers aren't suggesting that you blurt out personal details from your past, especially not right away. However, as a relationship progresses through the stages described in these pages, you may decide to disclose your relational baggage before others do so. Of course, some issues may never be shared. But in general, when partners begin forming bonds, "even negative information such as baggage may not be harmful."

Frisby, B. N., Sidelinger, R. J., & Booth-Butterfield, M. (2015). No harm, no foul: A social exchange perspective on individual and relational outcomes associated with relational baggage. *Western Journal of Communication, 79,* 555–572.

College students in one study said this stage in romantic relationships often involves a social media request or invite (Fox et al., 2013). Once access is given, communicators can look over each other's site, learning important information about the other person at a glance. Photos and mutual friends are important factors in deciding whether to continue developing a relationship. And of course, gathering this information online is less face-threatening and involves no stammering, blushing, or awkward pauses.

Of course, not all relational experiments are successful. You can probably think of times when you knew within an hour of meeting up with a potential new friend that things were going nowhere. The same can happen when online daters take the plunge and meet in person. The relationship that seemed promising in virtual reality may become less so when interacting face to face. Communication researchers call this shift in communication channels *modality switching* and have found that it comes with a variety of challenges (Ramirez et al., 2015). In general, the longer online couples hold off on meeting in person, the more awkward it will be when they attempt to transition to face-to-face communication.

Intensifying

When a relationship begins **intensifying**, communicators increase their amount of contact and the breadth and depth of their self-disclosure. In friendships, intensifying often includes spending more time together,

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participating in shared activities, hanging out with mutual friends, or taking trips together (Johnson et al., 2004). Dating couples use a wide range of strategies to communicate that their relationship is intensifying (Levine et al., 2006). About a quarter of the time they express their feelings directly to discuss the state of the relationship, such as saying "I love you" (Brantley et al., 2002). More often they use less direct methods of communication, perhaps as a way to protect their face: doing favors for the partner, giving tokens of affection, hinting and flirting, expressing feelings nonverbally, getting to know the partner's friends and family, and trying to look more attractive.

The intensifying stage is usually a time of relational excitement and even euphoria. In friendships, it's about enthusiasm for having a new "BFF." For romantic partners, it's often filled with starstruck gazes, goosebumps, and daydreaming. As a result, it's a stage that's regularly depicted in movies and romance novels—after all, we love to watch lovers in love (Johnson & Holmes, 2009). The problem, of course, is that the stage doesn't last forever. Sometimes romantic partners who stop feeling goosebumps begin to question whether they're still in love, and friends begin to discover one another's flaws. Although it's possible that the relationship isn't as good as it seems, it's equally likely that it has simply moved on to a different stage—such as integrating.

Integrating

As the relationship strengthens, the individuals enter an **integrating** stage; they begin to take on an identity as a social unit. Invitations begin to come addressed to a couple. Social circles merge. The partners share each other's commitments: "Sure, we'll spend Thanksgiving with your family." They may begin to designate common property—our apartment, our car, our song (Baxter, 1987). Partners create their own personal idioms (Dunleavy & Booth-Butterfield, 2009) and forms of play (Baxter, 1992). They develop routines and rituals that reinforce their identity as a couple—jogging together, eating at a favorite restaurant, expressing physical affection, and worshipping together (Afifi & Johnson, 1999; Bosson et al., 2006). As these examples illustrate, the stage of integrating is a time when we give up some characteristics of our former selves and become enmeshed with another person (Slotter & Gardner, 2009).

Bonding is a formalized statement of relational commitment. ***What messages have been exchanged in bonding rituals you have experienced? In what ways did those messages seem to affect the way the relationship unfolded?***

Integrating may include going "Facebook Official" (FBO) by declaring publicly that a couple is "in a relationship" (Lane et al., 2016). Of course, problems arise when one partner wants to be FBO and the other doesn't (Papp et al., 2012). And the meaning of FBO can be different for each partner. One study found that in heterosexual relationships, women tend to perceive FBO declarations as involving more intensity and commitment than men do (Fox & Warber, 2013). As a result, women may connect FBO status with the rights and restrictions normally associated with bonding—a stage we look at now.

Bonding

During the **bonding** stage, partners make symbolic public gestures to show the world that their relationship exists and that a commitment has been made (Foster, 2008). These can include engagement or marriage, sharing a residence, a public ceremony, or a written or verbal pledge. The key is that bonding is the culmination of a developed relationship—the "officializing" of a couple's integration.

Relationships don't have to be romantic to achieve bonding. Consider, for instance, authors contracting to write a book together or a student being initiated into a sorority. As Lillian Rubin (1985) notes, in some cultures there are rituals for friends to mark their bonded status through a public commitment:

> Some Western cultures have rituals to mark the progress of a friendship and to give it public legitimacy and form. In Germany, for example, there's a small ceremony called *Duzen*, the name itself signifying the transformation in the relationship. The ritual calls for the two friends, each holding a glass of wine or beer, to entwine arms, thus bringing each other physically close, and to drink up after making a promise of eternal brotherhood with the word *Bruderschaft*. When it's over, the friends will have passed from a relationship that requires the formal *Sie* mode of address to the familiar *du*.

Bonding usually marks an important turning point in relationships. Up to now the relationship may have developed at a steady pace: Experimenting gradually moved into intensifying and then into integrating. Now, however, there is a surge of commitment. The public display and declaration of exclusivity make this a critical period in the relationship.

Differentiating

So far, we have been looking at the growth of relationships. Although some reach a plateau of development, going on successfully for as long as a lifetime, others pass through several stages of decline and dissolution. Even in the most committed relationships, partners often find themselves needing to reestablish their individual identities in a stage Knapp

calls **differentiating**. This transition often shows up in a couple's pronoun usage. Instead of talking about "our" weekend plans, differentiating conversations focus on what "I" want to do. Relational issues that were once agreed on (such as "You'll be the breadwinner and I'll manage the home") now become points of contention: "Why am *I* stuck at home when I have better career potential than *you*?" The root of the term *differentiating* is the word *different*, suggesting that change plays an important role in this stage.

Differentiation also can be positive, considering that people need to be individuals as well as part of a relationship. Think, for instance, of young adults who want to forge their own unique lives and identities, even while maintaining their relationships with their families of origin (Skowron et al., 2009). The same can hold true for international couples who want to stay connected to their individual cultural values as well to each other (Kim et al., 2012a). As Figure 9.1 on page 266 shows, differentiating is often a part of normal relational maintenance in which partners manage the inevitable challenges that come their way. The key to successful differentiation is maintaining commitment to a relationship while also creating the space for being individuals (we describe this later in the chapter as the *connection-autonomy dialectic*).

Circumscribing

In the **circumscribing** stage, partners reduce the scope of their contact with each other. The word "circumscribe" comes from the Latin meaning "to draw circles around." Distinctions that emerged in the differentiating stage become more clearly marked and labeled: "my friends" and "your friends"; "my bank account" and "your bank account"; "my room" and "your room." Such distinctions can be markers of a healthy balance between individual and relational identity. They become a problem, however, when there are clearly more areas of separation than integration in a relationship, or when the areas of separation seriously limit interaction, such as taking a personal vacation expressly to put space between you and your partner.

Stagnating

If circumscribing continues, the relationship begins to stagnate. Members behave toward each other in old, familiar ways without much feeling. No growth occurs; relational boredom sets in (Harasymchuk & Fehr, 2013). The **stagnating** relationship is a shell of its former self. We see stagnation in many workers who have lost enthusiasm for their job yet continue to go through the motions for years. The same sad event occurs for some couples who unenthusiastically have the same conversations, see the same people, and follow the same routines without any sense of joy or novelty.

Avoiding

When stagnation becomes too unpleasant, people in a relationship begin to create distance between each other by **avoiding**. Sometimes they do it under the guise of excuses ("I've been sick lately and can't see you") and sometimes directly ("Please don't call me; I don't want to see you now").

Not all relationships last forever. With skill and goodwill, ending a relationship doesn't have to be combative. ***How would you describe the communication surrounding termination of your past relationships? Could you have done anything differently to make the end more amicable?***

In either case, by this point the handwriting is on the wall about the relationship's future.

Some relationships stall out at this stage. Friends, lovers, or family members simply drift apart, rarely if ever to interact again. While sometimes that's a natural parting of ways, other times it leaves important things unsaid. A need for some degree of relationship closure (Dailey et al., 2013) often leads to a final stage: terminating.

Terminating

Not all relationships end. Partnerships, friendships, and marriages can last for a lifetime once they're established. But many do deteriorate and reach the final stage, **terminating**, which has its own distinguishable pattern (Conlan, 2008). Characteristics of this stage include summary dialogues of where the relationship has gone and the desire to dissociate. The relationship may end with a cordial dinner, a note left on the kitchen table, a phone call, a text, or a legal document stating the dissolution. Depending on each person's feelings, this terminating stage can be quite short and amicable, or it may be bitterly drawn out over time.

Scholars have begun to investigate the role technology can play in relational termination. One survey of 1,000 people found that 45 percent had used their mobile device to end a relationship, usually by text (Mychalcewycz, 2009). Obviously, breaking up this way runs the risk of wounding and infuriating the person being dumped ("She didn't even have the guts to tell me to my face") and lessens the likelihood of post-relationship goodwill. A different study found that those on the receiving end of a breakup via a mediated channel tended to have high levels of attachment anxiety—which might explain why their partners didn't want to deliver the news in person (Weisskirch & Delevi, 2013).

Once a relationship is over, it may be wise to take a break from social media connections with that person (LeFebvre et al., 2015). Checking up on a former partner may reduce some uncertainty (Tong, 2013), but surveillance of an ex's Facebook page is associated with greater distress over the breakup, more negative feelings, and decreased personal growth (Lukacs & Quan-Haase, 2015). And in general, communicating with former partners can have negative consequences on one's current relationship (Rodriquez et al., 2016).

Terminating a relationship is, for many people, a learning experience. Researchers (Tashiro & Frazier, 2003) asked college students who

recently had a relationship breakup to describe the positive lessons from it that might help them in future relationships. Responses fell into four categories: "person positives," such as gaining self-confidence and recognizing that it's all right to cry; "other positives," such as learning more about what is desired in a partner; "relational positives," such as how to communicate better and how not to jump into a relationship too quickly; and "environment positives," such as learning to rely more on friends and how to better balance relationships and school work. And scholars note that although gaining *closure* might be an ideal for relational termination, finding *meaning* might be a more attainable and healthy goal (Frost et al., 2016).

DIALECTICAL TENSIONS

Not all theorists agree that relational stages are the best way to explain relational dynamics. Some maintain that it's possible for a relationship to have attributes of both "coming together" and "coming apart" at the same time. Maintaining relationships, then, is about managing these competing goals. Scholars call these struggles **dialectical tensions**: conflicts that arise when two opposing or incompatible desires exist simultaneously in a relationship.

Communication scholars including Leslie Baxter (2011; Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008) and William Rawlins (1992) have identified several dialectical forces that make successful communication challenging. Table 9.1 summarizes three that we experience both *internally*—within the relationship—and *externally*—as we and our relational partners face the world. Although descriptors such as "struggles" and "conflicts" can make dialectical tensions sound negative, it's best to see them as normal and manageable factors in maintaining healthy relationships.

Integration Versus Separation

Recognizing that no one is an island, we seek out involvement with others. But, at the same time, we are unwilling to sacrifice our entire identity to even the most satisfying relationship. The conflicting desires for connection and independence are embodied in the **integration–separation**

TABLE 9.1 Dialectical Tensions

	Integration–Separation	**Stability–Change**	**Expression–Privacy**
Internal Dialectic	Connection–Autonomy	Predictability–Novelty	Openness–Closedness
External Dialectic	Inclusion–Seclusion	Conventionality–Uniqueness	Revelation–Concealment

From Baxter, L. A. (1994). A dialogic approach to relationship maintenance. In D. J. Canary & L. Stafford (Eds.), *Communication and relational maintenance* (p. 240). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Even in the closest relationships, we seek autonomy as well as connection. ***How successfully have you juggled the opposing needs for integration and separation? How could you manage these tensions more successfully?***

dialectic. Sociolinguist Deborah Tannen (1986) captures this dialectic nicely by evoking the image of two porcupines trying to get through a cold winter:

> They huddle together for warmth, but their sharp quills prick each other, so they pull away. But then they get cold. They have to keep adjusting their closeness and distance to keep from freezing and from getting pricked by their fellow porcupines—the source of both comfort and pain.
>
> We need to get close to each other to have a sense of community, to feel we're not alone in the world. But we need to keep our distance from each other to preserve our independence, so others don't impose on or engulf us. This duality reflects the human condition. We are individual and social creatures. We need other people to survive, but we want to survive as individuals.

Internally (within a relationship), the struggle shows up in the **connection–autonomy dialectic**: We want to be close to others, but at the same time we seek independence (Frost & Forrester, 2013). The ability to manage the conflicting needs for connection and autonomy is basic to relational success (Erbert, 2000; Sahlstein & Dun, 2008). Some of the most common reasons for relational breakups involve failure of partners to satisfy one another's needs for connection: "We barely spent any time together"; "My partner wasn't committed to the relationship." But other relational complaints involve excessive demands for connection: "I was feeling trapped"; "I needed freedom" (Hui et al., 2013). Perhaps not surprisingly, research suggests that in heterosexual romantic relationships, men often want more autonomy and women typically want more connection and commitment (Buunk, 2005; Feeney, 1999).

Mobile devices can create a connection–autonomy dilemma (Duran et al., 2011). Frequent interaction during the day via cell phone can be a means for building intimacy in a romantic relationship (Boyle & O'Sullivan, 2016). However, receiving too many texts and calls can feel imposing or even smothering. This is a source of conflict for many couples and may require some negotiation of "rules" (Miller-Ott et al., 2012), such as "Please don't text me during job hours" or "I'll respond when the concert's over." The Focus on Research sidebar in this section further considers how mobile devices can be part of such dialectical tensions. These tensions occur in nonromantic relationships too. You can probably think of friends and family members who expect you to be always responsive via cell phone, yet you need some space from them (Hall & Baym, 2012; Eden & Veksler, 2016).

This serves as a reminder that dialectical tensions exist in most close relationships. In fact, Chapter 10 will look at how connection–autonomy is a central dialectic in managing family communication.

The tension between integration and separation also operates externally. In the **inclusion–seclusion dialectic**, a relational pair must reconcile a desire for both involvement with others outside the relationship and time together within the relationship. For example, at the end of a busy week, does a couple accept the invitation to a party (and sacrifice the chance to spend quality time with each other), or do they decline the invitation (and risk losing contact with valued friends)? Does a close-knit nuclear family choose to take a vacation together (instead of visiting relatives), or do they attend a family reunion (losing precious time to enjoy each other without any distractions)? How does a just-married couple negotiate time demands with in-laws when inclusion–seclusion tensions typically run high (Prentice, 2009)? These are questions that need to be answered in all close relationships.

Stability Versus Change

The **stability–change dialectic** acknowledges that stability is an important need in relationships, but that too much of it can lead to feelings of staleness. The **predictability–novelty dialectic** describes how this operates within a relationship. Although nobody wants a completely unpredictable

FOCUS ON RESEARCH

The Dialectical Tensions of Cell Phone Use

When spending time with a romantic partner, should you focus exclusively on each other—or is it okay to keep up with your social networks via cell phone? Do you have a say in each other's phone habits—or are you free to check your devices as you please?

Such dialectical tensions are normal, according to researchers Aimee Miller-Ott and Lynne Kelly. They ran focus groups with college students in dating relationships. The participants talked about using mobile devices in the presence of dating partners. Two sets of dialectical tensions emerged from the data.

The researchers titled the first struggle *Community vs. Romance* (similar to the inclusion–exclusion dialectic). On one hand, partners said they want to stay in touch with their social networks while dating ("You shouldn't just stop talking to your friends just because you're out with someone"). At the same time, putting away one's phone is a loving act toward a partner because "you're trying to convey to that person that you mean a lot to me and I wanna give you my time."

A second tension is *Control vs. Freedom* (similar to the connection–autonomy dialectic). Participants said they want to take charge of both their own and their partner's habitual phone use, which often feels out of control. But doing so can infringe on autonomy: "I don't want to be told what I can and can't do."

The participants said these tensions were a source of conflict in their dating relationships. There's no easy solution, but some relational metacommunication (as described on p. 279) about cell phone expectations might help you negotiate ways to manage conflicting desires.

Miller-Ott, A. E., & Kelly, L. (2016). Competing discourses and meaning making about romantic partners' cell-phone contact with non-present others. *Communication Studies, 67*, 58–76.

Media Clip

Finding Connection: *Trainwreck*

At an early age, Amy Townsend (Amy Schumer) is taught to repeat these words by her father: "Monogamy is impossible." It's a lesson she lives out in her (many) romantic encounters. Amy is good at her job and great at her nightlife, but she's a disaster at maintaining intimate relationships.

In spite of herself, Amy eventually falls in love with Aaron Conners (Bill Hader), a nice-guy surgeon. It's a predictable romantic comedy with one twist of stereotyping: It is she, not he, who struggles to commit. In terms of relational dialectics, Amy learns to balance autonomy with connection and novelty with predictability—and in so doing keeps their relational train from wrecking.

relational partner ("You're not the person I married!"), humorist Dave Barry (1990) exaggerates only slightly when he talks about the boredom that can come when partners know each other too well:

> After a decade or so of marriage, you know *everything* about your spouse, every habit and opinion and twitch and tic and minor skin growth. You could write a seventeen-pound book solely about the way your spouse eats. This kind of intimate knowledge can be very handy in certain situations—such as when you're on a TV quiz show where the object is to identify your spouse from the sound of his or her chewing—but it tends to lower the passion level of a relationship. (p. 47)

At an external level, the **conventionality–uniqueness dialectic** captures the challenges that people in a relationship face when trying to meet others' expectations while being true to themselves. On one hand, stable patterns of behavior do emerge that enable others to make useful judgments such as "happy family" or "dependable organization." But those blanket characterizations can stifle people in relationships who may sometimes want to break away from the expectations others hold of them. For example, playing the conventional role of "happy family" or "perfect couple" during a time of conflict can be a burden when the couple feels the need to behave in less stereotypical ways.

Expression Versus Privacy

Disclosure is one characteristic of interpersonal relationships. Yet, along with the drive for intimacy, we have an equally important need to maintain some space between ourselves and others. These sometimes conflicting drives create the **expression–privacy dialectic**.

The internal struggle between expression and privacy shows up in the **openness–closedness dialectic**. What do you do in an intimate relationship when a person you care about asks an important question that you don't want to answer? "Do you think I'm attractive?" "Are you having a good time?" "What's my problem?" Your commitment to the relationship may compel you toward honesty, but your concern for the other person's feelings and a desire for privacy may lead you to be less than completely

honest. Many people claim, "There are no secrets between my best friend and me," or "I tell my sweetheart everything," but that's likely an overstatement. Wise communicators make choices about what they will and won't share with loved ones—sometimes (but not always) for the other person's sake (Goldsmith & Domann-Scholz, 2013).

The same conflicts between openness and privacy operate externally in the **revelation–concealment dialectic**. If you and a longtime fellow worker haven't been getting along, do you answer the boss's question, "How's it going?" honestly, or do you keep your disagreement to yourselves? If your family has had a run of bad (or good) financial luck and a friend asks to borrow (or lend) money, do you share your situation or keep quiet? If you're part of a same-sex couple, but you're not sure your relationship will be endorsed by others, when and how do you go "public" with that information (Suter et al., 2006, 2008)? All of these questions speak to tensions related to concealing versus revealing. These challenges have increased as social media make privacy boundaries more difficult to manage (Debatin et al., 2009). We take a closer look at privacy management in Chapter 10.

Watch and Discuss

Look up and watch "Couples Swap Phones and Go Through Each Other's History."

1) Consider the role of *relational dialectics* (particularly *openness–closedness*) in this exercise.

2) Discuss the ethics of privacy management in an interpersonal relationship.

Strategies for Managing Dialectical Tensions

Managing dialectical tensions can be challenging (Duran et al., 2011; Prentice & Kramer, 2006). Yet researchers have identified a number of communication strategies for dealing with them—most of which are unconscious (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2006b). As you read on, think about which ones you use and how effective they are.

In the face of conflicting desires, some relational partners choose *denial*—pretending to themselves and one another that the conflicts don't exist. For example, a couple caught between the conflicting desires for stability and novelty might avoid the challenge by following predictable, if unexciting patterns of relating to one another. It's easy to see that this approach isn't likely to be satisfactory. *Compromising* is another unsatisfying approach. For example, the couple caught between the conflicting desires for predictability and novelty might settle for a lifestyle that is neither as predictable as one wants nor as surprise filled as the other seeks—not an ideal outcome.

Other strategies try—often unconsciously—to defuse tensions. Communicators might *alternate*, choosing one end of the dialectical spectrum at some times and the other end on different occasions. Friends, for example, might manage the connection–autonomy dialectic by alternating between spending a large amount of time together and living independent lives. Or they might *compartmentalize* different areas of their relationship. For example, a couple might manage the openness–closedness dialectic by sharing almost all their feelings about mutual friends but keeping certain parts of their past romantic histories private.

A more rewarding approach is to *accept*, and even embrace opposing desires. Barbara Montgomery (1993) describes a couple who accept both the needs for predictability and novelty by devising a "predictably novel" approach: Once a week they would do something together that

they had never done before. Similarly, Dawn Braithwaite and her colleagues (1998) found that stepfamilies often manage the tension between the "old family" and the "new family" by adapting and blending their family rituals.

Another constructive way to manage opposing desires is by *reframing* them. Consider how a couple who felt hurt by one another's unwillingness to share parts of their past might redefine the issue as an attractive aura of mystery. Rather than thinking "We're keeping secrets about our past," the partners might think, "Those secrets make things a little mysterious and exciting." The desire for privacy would still remain, but it would no longer compete with a need for openness about every aspect of the past.

Finally, it can be wise to *reaffirm* the fact that dialectical tensions will never disappear. Instead of trying to make them go away, reaffirming communicators accept—or even embrace—the challenges they present. The metaphorical view of relational life as a kind of rollercoaster reflects this orientation, and communicators who use reaffirmation view dialectical tensions as part of the ride.

COMMUNICATING ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS

By now it is clear that relationships are complex, dynamic, and important. In this section, we look at ways to improve relational communication. We start by revisiting an important principle of interpersonal communication discussed in Chapter 1: Every message has a *content* and a *relational* dimension.

CONTENT AND RELATIONAL MESSAGES

The most obvious component of most messages is their content—the subject being discussed. The content of statements such as "It's your turn to do the dishes" or "I'm busy Saturday night" is obvious. In addition, however, every message—both verbal and nonverbal—also has a second, relational dimension, which makes statements about how the communicators feel toward one another (Knobloch & Solomon, 2003; Watzlawick et al., 1967). These relational messages deal with one or more social needs: intimacy, affinity, respect, and control. Consider the examples we just mentioned:

- Imagine two ways of saying "It's your turn to do the dishes"—one that is demanding and another that is matter-of-fact. Notice how the different nonverbal messages make statements about how the sender views control in this part of the relationship. The demanding tone says, in effect, "I have a right to tell you what to do around the house"; whereas the matter-of-fact one suggests, "I'm just reminding you of something you might have overlooked."
- You can easily imagine two ways to deliver the statement "I'm busy Saturday night," one with little affection and the other with much liking.

Most of the time we are unaware of the relational messages that bombard us every day. Sometimes these messages don't capture our awareness because they match our belief about the amount of control, liking, or intimacy that is appropriate in a relationship. For example, you probably won't be offended if your boss tells you to drop everything and tackle a certain job because you agree that supervisors have the right to direct employees. However, if your boss delivered the order in a condescending, sarcastic, or abusive tone of voice, you would probably be offended. Your complaint wouldn't be with the order itself but with the way it was delivered. "I may work for this company," you might think, "but I'm not a slave or an idiot. I deserve to be treated like a human being."

Exactly how are relational messages communicated? As the boss–employee example suggests, they are usually expressed nonverbally, often through tone of voice. To test this fact for yourself, imagine how you could act while saying "Can you help me for a minute?" in a way that communicates each of the following relationships:

superiority	aloofness
helplessness	sexual desire
friendliness	irritation

Although nonverbal behaviors are a good source of relational messages, remember that they are ambiguous. The sharp tone you take as a personal insult might be due to fatigue, and the interruption you take as an attempt to ignore your ideas might be a sign of pressure that has nothing to do with you. Before you jump to conclusions about relational clues, it is a good idea to verify the accuracy of your interpretation with the other person: "When you cut me off, it seemed like you were angry with me. Were you?"

Not all relational messages are nonverbal. Social scientists use the term **metacommunication** to describe messages that refer to other messages (Craig, 2005; Weder, 2008). In other words, metacommunication is communication about communication. Whenever we discuss a relationship with others, we are metacommunicating: "I wish we could stop arguing so much," or "I appreciate how honest you've been with me."

Despite its importance, overt metacommunication isn't a common feature of many relationships. In fact, there seems to be an aversion to it, even among many intimates (Bisson & Levine, 2009; Zhang & Stafford, 2008). When 90 people were asked to identify the taboo subjects in their personal relationships, the most frequent topics involved metacommunication (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985). For example, people were reluctant to discuss the state of their current relationships and the norms ("rules") that governed their lives together. Nevertheless, there are times when it becomes necessary to talk about what is going on between

"She's texting me, but I think she's also subtexting me."

you and the other person. And research shows that metacommunication can play a vital role in relational maintenance and repair (Becker et al., 2008).

A related concept is what scholars call *relational work* (Jensen & Rauer, 2014, 2016). This kind of metacommunication focuses specifically on relationship problems. For romantic couples, this can involve discussions about finances, in-laws, or the way relational decisions are made. Sometimes partners talk about these issues directly with each other. Other times, they air their problems to friends. It's no surprise that discussing relational troubles with others—to the exclusion of doing so with one's partner—is harmful to relationships. But the good news is that couples who engage in relational work together report happier and longer relationships. And the principle extends beyond romantic partners: Negotiating interpersonal challenges can lead to improved relations with friends, family, and colleagues. Chapter 11 will have more to say about communication and conflict management.

MAINTAINING AND SUPPORTING RELATIONSHIPS

Just as gardens need tending, cars need tune-ups, and bodies need exercise, relationships need ongoing maintenance to keep them successful and satisfying (Lydon & Quinn, 2013). And when the chips are down, we count on our interpersonal relationships to offer the support we need (Lakey, 2013).

Relational Maintenance

As noted earlier, relational maintenance can be defined as communication that keeps relationships running smoothly and satisfactorily. What kinds of communication help maintain relationships? Researchers have identified several strategies that couples use to keep their interaction satisfying (Ogolsky & Bowers, 2013):

- *Positivity*. Keeping the relational climate polite and upbeat and also avoiding criticism.
- *Openness*. Talking directly about the nature of the relationship and disclosing your personal needs and concerns. This includes metacommunication and relational work, as discussed in the preceding section.
- *Assurances*. Letting the other person know—both verbally and nonverbally—that he or she matters to you and that you are committed to the relationship.
- *Social networks*. Being invested in each other's friends and family.
- *Sharing tasks*. Helping one another take care of life's chores and obligations.

These maintenance strategies aren't just for romantic relationships. One study analyzed college students' email to see which maintenance approaches they used (Johnson et al., 2008). With family and friends, two strategies were used most: openness ("Things have been a little crazy for me lately") and social networks ("How are you and Sam? Hopefully good"). With romantic partners, however, assurances ("This is just a little email to say I love you") were the most-used maintenance devices.

Social media can play an important role in maintaining relationships (Ledbetter & Keating, 2015). Social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram give communicators the chance to keep up with each other through status updates (Craig & Wright, 2012; Dainton, 2013). Of course, there's the risk that constant updates will leave little to talk about in person, as the cartoon on this page wryly suggests. Emails can help too, though calling is particularly valuable for more intimate topics (Utz, 2007). Even a streak of daily Snapchat exchanges can help maintain a relationship (Stein, 2017). One study found that women use social media for relational maintenance more often than men do, regardless of the type of relationship (Houser et al., 2012). This finding is consistent with research showing that women expect and receive more maintenance communication with their female friends than men do with male friends (Hall et al., 2011).

Social media can be especially useful for meeting the challenges of long-distance relationships. These relationships are increasingly common, and they can be as stable as, or even more so than, geographically close relationships (Merolla, 2010). This is true not only for romantic and family relationships, but also for friendships (Johnson, Becker, et al., 2009). The key is a

commitment to relational maintenance. In one study, female college students said that openness and mutual problem solving are vital maintenance strategies in long-distance dating relationships (McGuire & Kinnery, 2010). In another study, both men and women reported that openness (self-disclosure) was the most important factor for maintaining their long-distance friendships (Johnson, Haigh, et al., 2009). They conceded that sharing tasks and practical help may be less viable options in long-distance relationships ("I'd help if I could, but I'm a thousand miles away"). We talk more about relational maintenance strategies for close relationships in Chapter 10.

ASSESSING YOUR COMMUNICATION

Relational Maintenance

With a particular relationship partner in mind, read each of the following 14 questions, and consider the extent to which you agree or disagree with each. Use a 7-point scale, with 1 = "completely disagree," 7 = "completely agree," and 2 through 6 representing levels of agreement between these endpoints.

_____ **1.** Acts positively toward me.

_____ **2.** Is understanding.

_____ **3.** Talks about his/her feelings.

_____ **4.** Discusses the quality of our relationship.

_____ **5.** Talks about our plans for the future.

_____ **6.** Includes our friends in our activities.

_____ **7.** Shares in joint responsibilities that face us.

_____ **8.** Is upbeat when we are together.

_____ **9.** Is forgiving of me.

_____ **10.** Is open about his/her feelings.

_____ **11.** Tells me how she/he feels about the relationship.

_____ **12.** Tells me how much I mean to him/her.

_____ **13.** Does things with our friends.

_____ **14.** Helps with the tasks that need to be done.

Adapted from Stafford, L. (2011). Measuring relationship maintenance behaviors: Critique and development of the Revised Relationship Maintenance Behavior Scale. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 28,* 278–303; and Stafford, L. (2016). Marital sanctity, relationship maintenance, and marital quality. *Journal of Family Issues, 37,* 119–131.

For scoring information, see page 289 at the end of the chapter.

Social Support

Whereas relational maintenance is about keeping a relationship thriving, **social support** is about helping others during challenging times by providing emotional, informational, or instrumental resources (MacGeorge et al., 2011). Social support has been consistently linked to mental and physical health (Lakey, 2013) and can be offered in a variety of ways:

- *Emotional support*: Few things are more helpful during times of stress, hurt, or grief than a loved one who listens with empathy and responds in caring ways (Reis & Clark, 2013). Chapter 7 (pages 215–217) describes what supporting does and doesn't sound like when responding to others' emotional needs. It's important to keep your message *person centered* (High & Solomon, 2016)—that is, focused on the emotions of the speaker ("this must be so difficult for you") rather than minimizing those feelings ("it's not the end of the world") or diverting attention ("tomorrow is a new day").
- *Informational support*: The people in our lives can be helpful information sources. They can give us recommendations for shopping, advice about relationships, or observations about our blind spots. Of course, keep in mind that advice is most likely to be regarded as supportive when it's wanted and requested by the person in need.
- *Instrumental support*: Sometimes support is best given by rolling up your sleeves and doing a task or favor to show that you care (Semmer et al., 2008). This can be as simple as a ride to the airport or as involved as caregiving during illness. We count on loved ones to offer assistance in times of need, and instrumental support is a primary marker of a meaningful friendship ("a friend in need is a friend indeed").

Sometimes just being available for interaction can provide social support. One study found that patients who texted with friends after getting out of surgery required less pain medication that those who didn't (Guillory et al., 2015). It wasn't just a matter of distraction, because playing video games didn't have the same analgesic effect for the patients. The researchers maintain that interpersonal interaction—even via texting—offers social support and a measure of pain relief. This serves as a reminder that the simple act of communicating with others when they're hurting is an act of kindness that can help.

Social support can also be found online (Cole et al., 2017), often from people whom you may never meet in person (Rains et al., 2015). In fact, approximately 20 percent of internet users go online to find others with similar health problems (Fox, 2011). A common reason is that they feel more comfortable talking with like-minded people with whom they have few formal ties—particularly when the health issues are embarrassing or stigma laden. As an example, there are blogs that offer social support for people who are morbidly obese (Sanford, 2010). These sites become interactive communities where people with similar conditions share their struggles and offer each other affirming feedback. One blogger put it this way: "When I have a bad week on the scale, all I have to do is write up an entry and post it on the blog. My readers are always full of good advice, comments and support" (Sanford, 2010, p. 577).

REPAIRING DAMAGED RELATIONSHIPS

Sooner or later, even the most satisfying and stable relationships hit a bumpy patch. Some problems arise from outside forces: work, finances, competing relationships, and so on. At other times, problems arise from differences and disagreements within the relationship. In Chapter 11, we offer guidelines for dealing with these sorts of challenges. A third type of relational problem comes from **relational transgressions**, when one partner violates the explicit or implicit terms of the relationship, letting the other one down in some important way.

Types of Relational Transgressions

Table 9.2 lists some types of relational transgressions. Violations such as these fall into different categories (Guerrero & Bachman. 2008), which we now describe.

Minor Versus Significant Some of the items listed in Table 9.2 aren't inherently transgressions, and in small doses they can actually aid relationships. For instance, a *little* distance can make the heart grow fonder, a *little* jealousy can be a sign of affection, and a *little* anger can start the process of resolving a gripe. In large and regular doses, however, these acts become

@work Relational Repair on the Job

When workers make mistakes that affect others, there's often a need for relational repair. Stanford University's Emma Seppala (2015) maintains that compassion trumps toughness when responding to employee and coworker mistakes.

Seppala cites studies showing that lashing out when things go wrong erodes workplace loyalty. And when employees work in a climate of fear and anxiety, they're not as creative or productive. By contrast, showing compassion builds interpersonal and professional bonds. This isn't to suggest that mistakes should be overlooked; rather, there are better and worse ways to call them out and repair the damage.

Here are Seppala's suggestions for addressing professional infractions. Although they're geared for managers, the principles are helpful for any workplace relationships:

1. *Take a moment*. Rash reactions to mistakes will likely leave relational scars. By stepping back and taking time to reflect, you'll allow for a more thoughtful response.
2. *Put yourself in the other's shoes*. Keep in mind what it's like when you've made a mistake on the job, and try to have empathy for the offender's plight. This is especially important for company veterans working with newcomers.
3. *Forgive*. It's in everyone's best interest to treat transgressors with grace. One supervisor described it this way: "It's not that I let them off the hook, but by choosing a compassionate response when they know they have made a mistake, they are not destroyed, they have learned a lesson, and they want to improve for you because you've been kind to them."

TABLE 9.2 Some Types of Relational Transgressions

Category	Examples
Lack of Commitment	Failure to honor important obligations (e.g., financial, emotional, task related) Self-serving dishonesty Unfaithfulness
Distance	Physical separation (beyond what is necessary) Psychological separation (avoidance, ignoring)
Disrespect	Criticism (especially in front of third parties)
Problematic Emotions	Jealousy Unjustified suspicion Rage
Aggression	Verbal hostility Physical violence

serious transgressions that can damage personal relationships. When transgression severity is perceived as high, and the perceiver's communication competence is low, rumination increases and relational closeness decreases (Robbins & Merrill, 2014).

Social Versus Relational Some transgressions violate *social rules* shared by society at large. For example, almost everyone would agree that ridiculing or humiliating a friend or family member in public is a violation of a fundamental social rule regarding saving others' face. Other rules are *relational* in nature—unique norms constructed by the people involved. For instance, some families have a rule stating, "If I'm going to be more than a little bit late, I'll let you know so that you don't worry." Once such a rule exists, failure to honor it feels like a violation, even though outsiders might not view it as such.

Deliberate Versus Unintentional Some transgressions are unintentional. You might reveal something about a friend's past without realizing that this disclosure would be embarrassing. Other violations, though, are intentional. In a fit of anger, you might purposely lash out with a cruel comment, knowing that it will hurt the other person's feelings.

One-time Versus Incremental The most obvious transgressions occur in a single episode: an act of betrayal, a verbal assault, or walking out in anger. But more subtle transgressions can occur over time. Consider emotional withdrawal: Sometimes people retreat into themselves, and we usually give one another the space to do just that. But if the withdrawal slowly becomes pervasive, it becomes a violation of the fundamental rule in most relationships that partners should be available to one another.

Strategies for Relational Repair

Research confirms the commonsense notion that a first step to repairing a transgression is to talk about the violation (Brandau-Brown & Ragsdale, 2008). Chapter 5 offers tips for sending clear, assertive "I-messages" when you believe you've been wronged ("I was really embarrassed when you yelled at me in front of everybody last night"), whether describing the outcomes of the transgression or asking for an apology (Peyton & Goei, 2013).

In other cases, you might be responsible for the transgression and want to raise it for discussion: "What did I do that you found so hurtful?" "Why was my behavior a problem for you?" Asking questions such as these—and listening nondefensively to the answers—can be an enormous challenge. In Chapter 7, we offer guidelines for listening; in Chapter 11, we provide tips about how to manage criticism.

Not surprisingly, some transgressions are harder to repair than others. One study of dating partners found that sexual infidelity and breaking up with the partner were the two least forgivable offenses (Bachman & Guerrero, 2006). The seriousness of the transgression and the relative strength of the relationship prior to the offense are the two most significant factors in whether forgiveness will be granted (Guerrero & Bachman, 2010).

For the best chance of repairing a seriously damaged relationship, an apology needs to be offered. *The Last Lecture* author Randy Pausch (2008) notes, "If you have done something wrong in your dealings with another person, it's as if there's an infection in your relationship. A good apology is like an antibiotic, a bad apology is like rubbing salt in the wound" (p. 161). As the cartoon on this page illustrates, some apologies are less than sincere. Here are the top three things people look for in an apology, in order of importance (Lewicki et al., 2016):

1. Acknowledgment of responsibility: "It was my fault; I acted like a selfish jerk."
2. Offer of repair: "I'll fix what I did and make things right."
3. Expression of regret: "I'm really sorry. I feel awful for letting you down."

Even if you offer an ideal apology, it may be unrealistic to expect immediate forgiveness. Sometimes, especially with severe transgressions, expressions of regret and promises of new behavior will only be accepted

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conditionally, with a need for them to be demonstrated over time before the aggrieved party regards them as genuine (Merolla, 2008).

Given the challenges and possible humiliation involved in apologizing, is it worth the effort? Research suggests yes. Participants in one study consistently reported that they had more remorse over apologies they *didn't* offer than about those they did (Exline et al., 2007). If you need to make things right with someone you've offended, better to do so now than to regret that you didn't.

Forgiving Transgressions

You might think that forgiveness is a topic for theologians and philosophers. However, social scientists have found that forgiving others has both personal and relational benefits (Antonuccio & Jackson, 2009). On a personal level, forgiveness has been shown to reduce emotional distress and aggression (Eaton & Struthers, 2006; Orcutt, 2006) and improve cardiovascular functioning (Hannon et al., 2012). Interpersonally, extending forgiveness to lovers, friends, and family can often help restore damaged relationships (Fincham & Beach, 2013). Moreover, most research shows that transgressors who have been forgiven are usually less likely to repeat their offenses than those who have not received forgiveness (Whited et al., 2010).

Even when a sincere apology is offered, forgiving others can be difficult. Research shows that one way to improve your ability to forgive is to recall times when you have mistreated or hurt others in the past—in other words, to remember that you, too, have wronged others and needed their forgiveness (Exline et al., 2008). Given that it's in our own best interest to be forgiving, we would do well to remember these words from Richard Walters (1984), who saw forgiveness as a choice requiring courage and continuous acts of will: "When we have been hurt we have two alternatives: be destroyed by resentment, or forgive. Resentment is death; forgiving leads to healing and life" (p. 366).

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Objective 9.1 Recognize the various reasons for entering into interpersonal relationships.

Explanations for forming relationships with certain people include appearance (physical attractiveness), similarity, complementarity, rewards, competency, proximity, and disclosure.

Q: Which of the factors listed in this chapter best describe the bases of your most important interpersonal relationships?

Objective 9.2 Describe the stages and dialectical tensions typically experienced in interpersonal relationships.

Some theorists argue that interpersonal relationships may go through as many as 10 stages of growth and deterioration: initiating, experimenting, intensifying, integrating, bonding, differentiating, circumscribing, stagnating, avoiding, and terminating.

Other models describe the dynamics of interpersonal communication in terms of dialectical

tensions: mutually opposing, incompatible desires that can never be completely resolved. These dialectical tensions include integration–separation, stability–change, and expression–privacy.

Q: Trace the stages of one of your important close relationships. What is its current stage, and where is it headed?

Q: Describe the relational dialectics that shape communication in your most important relationships. Which strategies are most effective for dealing with these tensions?

Objective 9.3 Identify specific skills communicators can use to maintain and improve their interpersonal relationships.

Relational messages sometimes are expressed overtly via verbal metacommunication; however, more frequently they are conveyed nonverbally.

Interpersonal relationships require maintenance to stay healthy. Relational partners should use positive and open communication that includes assurances and demonstrates commitment and that the relationship matters. Partners should invest in each other's social networks and share tasks. Interpersonal communicators should also offer social support in their relationships through the exchange of emotional, informational, and instrumental resources.

Some relationships become damaged over time; others are hurt by relational transgressions. Apologies and forgiveness are particularly important strategies for repairing damaged relationships.

Q: To what extent does your most important close relationship exhibit the kinds of positive and open communication described in this chapter? Identify transgressions you have made in this relationship. Is it necessary to repair these transgressions? How could you put the strategies described in this chapter into action?

KEY TERMS

Avoiding (271)
Bonding (270)
Circumscribing (271)
Comparison level (CL) (263)
Comparison level of alternatives (CL_{alt}) (264)
Connection–autonomy dialectic (274)
Conventionality–uniqueness dialectic (276)
Dialectical tensions (273)
Differentiating (271)
Experimenting (267)
Expression–privacy dialectic (276)
Inclusion–seclusion dialectic (275)
Initiating (267)
Integrating (269)
Integration–separation dialectic (273)
Intensifying (268)
Metacommunication (279)
Openness–closedness dialectic (276)
Predictability–novelty dialectic (275)
Relational maintenance (266)
Relational transgressions (284)
Revelation–concealment dialectic (277)
Social exchange theory (262)
Social support (283)
Stability–change dialectic (275)
Stagnating (271)
Terminating (272)

ACTIVITIES

1. Conduct a survey on interpersonal relationships. Ask your respondents the most important reasons they have formed, and continue to maintain, close interpersonal relationships, using the categories on pages 260–266. Report your findings to your class. Together, compile an aggregate ranking of the reasons.

2. With a group of classmates, share the dialectical tensions that operate in your close personal relationships. Discuss the strategies you and your

classmates use to deal with these tensions, focusing on the way those strategies are expressed via communication. Finally, discuss how well each strategy helps promote a healthy and satisfying relationship.

3. Identify an important relational dimension (positive or troublesome) in a current or past close relationship. Describe to your classmates how you did express, or could have expressed, your thoughts and feelings via metacommunication.

4. Along with your classmates, write (anonymously) a relational transgression that you have committed. Describe how you did communicate, or how you could have communicated, in an attempt to repair the relationship.

SCORING FOR ASSESSING YOUR COMMUNICATION (PAGE 282)

Add your responses to items 1 and 8.	This score represents your perception of your partner's use of *Positivity* maintenance behaviors.
Add your responses to items 2 and 9.	This score represents your perception of your partner's use of *Understanding* maintenance behaviors.
Add your responses to items 3 and 10.	This score represents your perception of your partner's use of *Self-Disclosure* maintenance behaviors.
Add your responses to items 4 and 11.	This score represents your perception of your partner's use of *Relationship Talk* maintenance behaviors.
Add your responses to items 5 and 12.	This score represents your perception of your partner's use of *Assurances* maintenance behaviors.
Add your responses to items 6 and 13.	This score represents your perception of your partner's use of *Networks* maintenance behaviors.
Add your responses to items 7 and 14.	This score represents your perception of your partner's use of *Tasks* maintenance behaviors.

Which relational maintenance behaviors did you perceive your partner as using most, and which least? These seven types of maintenance behaviors are independent; that is, a person can be perceived as enacting none, one, two, or even all seven. A review of studies using a version of this instrument (Ogolsky & Bowers, 2013) concluded that women are perceived as using more of the different types of relational maintenance behaviors than men. Which relational maintenance behaviors are most important in your relationship?

10

Communication in Close Relationships

Friends, Family, and Romantic Partners

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

10.1 Identify the different types of friendship and the role communication plays in maintaining them.

10.2 Describe how communication creates and sustains relationships within families.

10.3 Describe the ways in which love is expressed in romantic relationships.

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WHAT RELATIONSHIPS are most important to you? When researchers posed this question to several hundred college students, the answers were varied (Berscheid et al., 1989). Roughly half (47%) identified a romantic partner. About a third (36%) chose a friendship. Most of the rest (14%) cited a family member. These meaningful relationships aren't just nice to have—they're vital. Research shows that close relationships "may be the *single most important* source of life satisfaction and emotional well-being, across different ages and cultures" (Peterson, 2006, p. 261).

Building on the relational principles of Chapter 9, this chapter examines three types of close relationships: friends, family, and romantic partners. These categories aren't mutually exclusive. For example, you may have a friend who is like family to you (Tannen, 2016). Or maybe your sibling is one of your closest confidants. Your significant other could fit into all three categories: your lover, friend, and co-parent of your family. Anthropologist Robin Dunbar (2014) suggests that humans have the capacity to be intimately connected with only about five people at a time. It's likely those five come from some combination of the three categories described in this chapter. (Take a moment to identify the closest relationships in your life right now and see if that's the case.)

Although there can be overlap, this chapter will treat these three contexts as distinct and will analyze the unique characteristics of each—beginning with friendship.

COMMUNICATION IN FRIENDSHIPS

Type the word "friendship" into a web browser along with one of these phrases: "in songs," "in movies," "in TV shows." You'll see that popular culture is filled with references to friends and friendship. In fact, you can probably think of several artistic tributes to friendship on your own without searching online. We depict and celebrate these special relationships because they are central to what it means to be human.

Communication is the most important tool for creating and maintaining friendships. ***How satisfied are you with your ability to communicate with current and potential friends?***

But what exactly is a friend? Scholars have offered many definitions of friendships (e.g., Bukowski et al., 2009; Fehr, 2000). Most of them include the notions that a **friendship** is a voluntary relationship that provides social support. Most important for our purposes, friendships are created, managed, and maintained through communication (Johnson, Becker, et al., 2009; McEwan & Guerrero, 2010). Different types of friendships involve different levels of communication, as we explore now.

TYPES OF FRIENDSHIPS

Before reading further, identify three friends from distinct parts of your life—perhaps an old neighborhood pal, someone from work, and your BFF

("best friend forever"). Keep these three friends in mind as you read each of the following sets of dimensions. These categories will help you see that all friendships are not the same, and that communication patterns vary depending on the type of friendship.

Short Versus Long Term

Friends come in and out of our lives for a variety of reasons. Some friendships last for years or even a lifetime, while others fade or end because of life changes (such as finishing high school, moving to a new location, or switching jobs). Although modern technologies have decreased the likelihood that a friendship will end because of a long-distance move (Utz, 2007), some relationships falter or fail without face-to-face contact. Another reason some friendships may be short term is due to a change in values (Solomon & Knafo, 2007). Perhaps you once had a group of friends with whom you enjoyed parties and nightlife, but as you grew out of that phase of your life, the mutual attraction waned. Take a moment to consider the three friends you identified earlier and where they fall on a short-term versus long-term continuum (you can do the same comparison for each of the following categories).

Task Versus Maintenance Oriented

Sometimes we choose friends because of shared activities: teammates in a softball league, coworkers, or fellow movie buffs. These types of friendships are considered task oriented if they primarily revolve around certain activities. By contrast, maintenance-oriented friendships are grounded in mutual liking and social support, independent of shared activities. Of course these categories overlap; some friendships are based in both joint activities and emotional support.

Low Versus High Disclosure

How much do you tell your friends about yourself? No doubt your level of disclosure differs from friend to friend. Some know only general information about you, whereas others are privy to your most personal secrets. The Social Penetration Model in Chapter 3 (pages 86–87) can help you explore the breadth and depth of your disclosure with various friends.

Low Versus High Obligation

There are some friends for whom we would do just about anything—no request is too big. We feel a lower sense of obligation to other friends, both in terms of what we would do for them and how quickly we would do it. Our closest friends usually get fast responses when they ask for a favor, send a text, or need late-night help (the Focus on Research sidebar in this section sheds light on the obligations of close friends).

Infrequent Versus Frequent Contact

You probably keep in close touch with some friends. Perhaps you work out, travel, or socialize together, or you Skype daily. Other friendships have less frequent contact—maybe an occasional call, text, or email. Of course, infrequent contact doesn't always correlate with levels of disclosure or obligation.

Many close friends may see each other only once a year, but they pick right back up in terms of the breadth and depth of their shared information.

After reading this far, you can begin to see how the nature of communication can vary from one friendship to another. Furthermore, communication *within* a friendship can also change over time. Impersonal friendships can have sudden bursts of disclosure. The amount of communication can swing from more to less frequent. Low-obligation friendships can evolve into stronger commitments, and vice versa. In a few pages you'll read about types of communication that are common in virtually all good friendships. But for now, it's important to recognize that variety is a good thing.

FRIENDSHIPS, GENDER, AND COMMUNICATION

Not all friendships are created equal. Along with the differences described in the preceding pages, gender plays a role in how we communicate with friends.

Same-Sex Friendships

Same-sex friendships can enrich life from early childhood through old age. ***What communication practices help maintain and improve your same-sex friendships?***

Recall the first friend you ever had. If you're like most people, that person was probably the same sex as you. Many of the first close relationships outside the family are with same-sex friends (Bukowski et al., 1996), and many adults maintain intimate same-sex friendships. In fact, it's likely that the majority of the people you call friends (of any sort) are of your same biological sex. (Exceptions to this norm are discussed later in this section.) In the popular vernacular, women often identify a female "BFF" (Demir et al., 2013). Close but nonsexual friendships between men are sometimes called "bromances" (Alberti, 2013), or "bromosexual" when they involve gay and straight friends (Farber, 2016).

Early studies on same-sex friendships (summarized in Fehr, 1996) suggested that women bond primarily through mutual self-disclosure, while men create intimacy through shared activities more than talk. Friendship scholar Geoffrey Greif (2009) described male friendships this way: "Guys get together and have shoulder-to-shoulder relationships—we do things together, as compared with women, who are more apt to have face-to-face relationships" (p. 6). And a more recent study supports the notion that female friendships often develop through one-on-one interaction, while men tend to bond in groups (David-Barrett et al., 2015).

Overall, however, contemporary research on same-sex friendships suggests that gender differences may have been overstated in earlier studies—or perhaps norms have changed (Garfield, 2015).

FOCUS ON RESEARCH

Close Friendships: State of the Union

Despite the importance of friendship, the small body of research that studies this vital relationship type has been based on limited, narrow samples. Brian Gillespie and his colleagues teamed up with a major news website to survey more than 25,000 people across a variety of demographic categories about their close adult friendships.

The researchers wanted to include both expressive (talking) and instrumental (doing) components of friendship in their survey questions. Respondents were asked to identify the number of friends with whom they could (1) have a discussion about their sex lives, (2) expect to do something to celebrate their birthday, and (3) call or text if they were in trouble late at night. Here are some of the results:

- Virtually all respondents reported having at least one close friend, as defined by the criteria above. On average, both women and men identified about four friends they could talk to about sex, and five to six friends they could rely on to celebrate their birthday or provide late-night help.
- Participants had more same-sex than cross-sex friends. Otherwise, there were surprisingly few differences between men and women in terms of how they carry out their friendships.
- Single young adults without children had more close friends than did married couples, parents, and older adults.
- More than 70 percent of both men and women said they were satisfied with their close friendships—and the higher their friendship satisfaction, the greater their overall life satisfaction.
- One other finding was clear: Friendship quality trumps quantity. "It is not how many friends a person has that matters most," note the authors, "but rather how happy one feels with the friendships he or she has that matters."

Gillespie, B. J., Lever, J., Frederick, D., & Royce, T. (2015). Close adult friendships, gender, and the life cycle. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 32,* 709–736.

The large-scale survey described in the Focus on Research sidebar in this section found almost no differences in number of close friends reported by men and women, nor in how friendship is communicated. Some research suggests that women expect more disclosure and emotional support from their female friends than men do from their male friends (Hall, 2011). Nevertheless, these studies confirm that both men and women value same-sex friendships for both emotional support and shared activities.

Cross-Sex Friendships

Cross-sex friendships offer a wealth of benefits (Proscal, 2015). They can provide a different perspective and a contrast to the kinds of interaction that sometimes characterize communication with friends of the same sex (Holmstrom, 2009). For men, this often means a greater chance to share emotions and focus on relationships. For women, it can be a chance to lighten up and enjoy banter without emotional baggage (Sapadin, 1988). These friendships also give heterosexual singles access to a broader network of potential romantic partners (Hand & Furman, 2009).

One type of close, typically cross-sex friendship has gained its own label: the *work spouse* (Miller, 2016). Because it's gotten attention in the popular press, communication researchers set out to study the phenomenon (McBride & Bergen, 2015). After surveying hundreds of people in

work-spouse relationships, the scholars created this definition from the participants' descriptions: "a special, platonic friendship with a work colleague characterized by a close emotional bond, high levels of disclosure and support, and mutual trust, honesty, loyalty, and respect" (p. 502). Because these friendships blur personal–professional borders, communication is important for creating and sustaining these relationships. For instance, the participants repeatedly mentioned the word "platonic" to communicate to themselves and to others the nature (and restrictions) of their friendship.

Cross-sex friendships—at least for heterosexuals—present some challenges that don't exist among all-male or all-female companionships. The most obvious is the potential for sexual attraction (Halatsis & Christakis, 2009). One study (Bleske-Rechek et al., 2012) found that romantic attraction between such friends is common—and problematic. Most participants who reported attraction to a cross-sex friend acknowledged that it negatively affected their current romantic relationship. Although it's possible to have romance-free, cross-sex friendships between heterosexuals, defining that sort of relationship can take effort (Malachowski & Dillow, 2011). Some evidence suggests that cross-sex friends communicate more online to keep the relationship platonic (Ledbetter et al., 2011). And some cross-sex friends don't keep things strictly platonic, as we discuss in the "Friends with Benefits" section that follows.

When it comes to the potential for romance, heterosexual cross-sex friendships fit into one of four categories (Guerrero & Chavez, 2005):

- *Mutual Romance*—both partners want the friendship to turn romantic
- *Strictly Platonic*—neither partner wants the friendship to turn romantic
- *Desires Romance*—one partner wants romance but fears the friend does not
- *Rejects Romance*—one partner does not want romance but thinks the friend does

Not surprisingly, the last two types of relationships are the most complicated. Guerrero and Chavez found that the less interested partner in these situations used strategies to communicate "no go" messages: less routine contact and activity, less flirtation, and more talk about outside romance (see also Weger & Emmett, 2009).

Watch and Discuss

Look up and watch the Science of Love video "Can Men and Women Be Just Friends?"

1) Consider the topics addressed in this piece in terms of research on *cross-sex friendships*. Do you agree or disagree with their conclusions?
2) Discuss the value of talking about (rather than ignoring or suppressing) feelings of attraction in cross-sex friendships.

Friends with Benefits

Somewhere between friendship and romance is a *friends with benefits* (FWB) relationship—a popular term for friendships that include sexual activity. These relationships have become increasingly common and come in many varieties (Mongeau et al., 2013). Most participants claim it's an opportunity for sex with "no strings attached," although there are usually more "strings" than partners want to acknowledge. Some FWB relationships transition into romances (Owen & Fincham, 2012); others are transitioning *out* of romances; still others serve as "placeholders" until better options come along (Jonason, 2013).

Men and women are equally likely to be in FWB relationships. Some surveys suggest that both appreciate the chance to meet physical needs

without the challenges of emotional commitment (Green & Morman, 2011). Despite this similarity, there are gender differences in the way FWB relationships turn out. Study participants have commented that women are typically more focused on being "friends," whereas men are more likely to be interested in the "benefits" (Lehmiller et al., 2011). As a result, women may find FWB arrangements less satisfying than men do, both relationally and communicatively (Fahs & Munger, 2015).

As you may expect, research shows that FWB partners routinely avoid explicit communication about the status of their relationship (Bisson & Levine, 2009). Compared to traditional romantic couples, FWB partners also communicate less about sex and are less sexually satisfied (Lehmiller et al., 2014). They do, however, practice safe sex more often and are more willing to talk about the sexual experiences they've had outside their relationship. The communicative complexities of these relationships lead researchers to note a paradox: "FWB relationships are often problematic for the same reasons that they are attractive" (Bisson & Levine, 2009, p. 66).

Gender Considerations

Biological sex isn't the only factor to consider when we examine different sorts of friendships. Another important consideration is *sex role* (see Chapter 4, page 113). For instance, a friendship between a masculine male and a feminine female might have very different properties than a friendship between a masculine female and a feminine male—even though these are both technically cross-sex relationships (Holmstrom, 2009).

Sexual orientation is another factor that can shape friendships. Most obviously, for gay men and lesbians the potential for sexual attraction shifts from cross- to same-sex relationships. But physical attraction aside, sexual orientation can still play a significant role in friendships (Galupo & Gonzalez, 2013). One category of close friendship that has received a good deal of attention is between gay men and straight women. Many heterosexual women report that they value their friendships with gay men because (a) they often share interests, (b) the potential for romantic complications is small or nonexistent (Hopcke & Rafaty, 2001), and (c) the women feel more attractive (Bartlett et al., 2009). Gay men and straight women also trust romantic advice from each other more than from other sources (Russell et al., 2013). It appears that sexual attraction—or the lack thereof—is an important consideration in successful friendships (Gillespie, Frederick, et al., 2015).

FRIENDSHIP AND SOCIAL MEDIA

IRL (in real life) it's not hard to tell who counts as a friend. The internet, however, has made friendship more complicated (Amichai-Hamburger et al., 2013). Consider Facebook, where a "friend" could be someone you met once at a party or on vacation, a former classmate or neighbor whom you haven't seen in years, someone you met online but have never known in person, or even a person who accepted your friend request simply to boost the size of his or her friends list. Bearing this out, college students who were shown photos of their Facebook friends could accurately identify only 72 percent of those friends' names (Croom et al., 2016).

Despite all the possibilities, research shows that social networking sites are used primarily to maintain current friendships or to revive old ones, rather than to build new relationships (Anderson et al., 2012). Contrary to some reports, teens typically use social networking sites to connect with known others, not strangers (Reich et al., 2012). In terms of safety, that's a wise boundary to keep (Miller & Mundey, 2015).

Although the vast majority of U.S. teens and millennials are on Facebook and check it regularly, many of them maintain their friendships through newer platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and WhatsApp (Kemp, 2016). One analyst (Choi, 2016) interviewed a sampling of teens across the country and learned their unwritten rules for communicating via social media. Here are a few of the guidelines they identified:

- When a friend posts a selfie on Instagram, there's a social obligation to like it—and if you're close friends, you might need to comment. Nothing deep—just enough to show interest.
- However, it's possible to show *too* much interest, and that's a violation. One example is the "deep like." This involves going back in someone's Instagram archives and liking an old post. It suggests you're lurking, and that "lacks chill."
- Snapchat photos are often sent in streaks. A friend should respond in kind to what you sent and keep the streak going. Content isn't important—the relational message is "I'm keeping up with you."
- Privacy is a big deal. Facebook is far more public, and that's why teens don't use it as often for personal communication. Setting an Instagram account to private and then letting a friend in is a statement of trust. Likewise, screengrabbing Snapchat messages is not good form—they were meant to disappear after being shared with trusted recipients.

Social networking sites aren't the only media for communicating with friends. Calling, texting, instant messaging, and even online gaming are means for keeping up friendships (Liu & Yang, 2016). As noted in Chapter 9 (pages 281–282), these media can help friends maintain their relationship and provide a measure of social support. But the closest of friends realize that no matter how much they stay in touch with each other electronically, there's no substitute for a night on the town together, a stimulating in-person conversation, or a good hug.

COMMUNICATION IN SUCCESSFUL FRIENDSHIPS

As you've just read, friendships come with a set of expectations about how to communicate. We rarely discuss these assumptions, and we often become aware of them only when they aren't met. Communication scholars have

found that **expectancy violations**—instances when others don't behave as we assume they should—are the source of many relational problems (Cohen, 2010; Hall et al., 2011). The following guidelines, culled from several studies (Argyle & Henderson, 1984; Hall, 2012; LaBelle & Myers, 2016), offer prescriptions on what most people expect from their friends. You can judge the success of your friendships, at least in part, by seeing how closely you follow these prescriptions.

Share Joys and Sorrows

When you have bad news, you want to tell friends who will offer comfort and support (Vallade et al., 2016). When a friend has good news, you want to hear about it and celebrate. When sharing sorrows and joys with friends, it's often important how quickly and in what order the news is delivered. The closer the friendship, the higher the expectation for sharing soon. If a friend asks, "How come I'm the last to find out about your new job?" you may have committed an expectancy violation.

Share Laughs and Memories

A hallmark of a healthy relationship is shared laughter (Kurtz & Algoe, 2017). One study found that close friends have a distinctive laugh, and that people across cultures can pinpoint in seconds how intimate friends are by listening to them chortle together (Bryant et al., 2016). Another study found that friends regularly prod and deepen each other's memory banks—so much that "sharing a brain" is an accurate descriptor for the closest of friends (Iannone et al., 2016). If you get together with longtime pals and laugh as you recount things you've done together ("Remember that time when we. . . ."), you can probably call your friendship a success.

Provide a Listening Ear

As you'll read in Chapter 12, listening is an important type of confirming message. Giving a friend your undivided attention and the opportunity to vent is one way to show that you care (Kellas et al., 2015). In Chapter 7, we describe a variety of responses you can offer to a friend to demonstrate that you're listening and understanding.

Maintain Confidences

Betraying a confidence can injure, or even end, a friendship (Bello et al., 2014). When you share personal information with a friend, you expect that person to be discreet about what you said—especially when the information could damage your reputation or other relationships.

Lend a Helping Hand

The old saying "A friend in need is a friend indeed" is supported by studies showing that providing assistance is one of the most tangible markers of a friendship (MacGeorge et al., 2004; Semmer et al., 2008). Need a ride to the airport, some help on moving day, or a quick loan until payday? These are the kinds of things we expect from friends.

@work Social Media Relationships with Coworkers

Search the phrase "social media and coworkers" and you'll find a host of articles about the pros and cons of friending and following workmates online. This kind of online sharing involves both risks and rewards.

On the positive side, social media can help create bonds by allowing colleagues to learn about each other's lives away from the job. "In some ways, social media have replaced team-building events that used to take place off-site," says one business owner. "You get to know the people you work with on a deeper level" (Goodman, 2014). That can help the company's bottom line, according to another executive: "The more relationships are built and fostered, the more productive the environment." In fact, you might be considered antisocial if you *don't* connect on social media with your colleagues.

Along with these benefits, online sharing with coworkers has its perils. Some experts believe the risks are so great that they categorically recommend against friending colleagues (Simko, 2013; Wu, 2017). Others (Penning, 2016; Whitteberry, 2016) suggest proceeding with caution. Consider these guidelines as you think about sharing your personal life online with fellow workers:

Use lists and filters: You can manage your privacy somewhat by choosing what your coworkers do and don't get to see about your personal life. It might be fine to share your triumphs on the tennis court, but it could be a career-killer to post about pounding Jell-O shots.

Remember, privacy isn't guaranteed: Even if you use filters, people who have less restricted access to your posts can sometimes share them with a broader audience. Think twice before you grouse about your colleague's bad jokes or your boss's hygiene habits.

Use good sense: Keep your audience—*all* of your audience—in mind as you choose what to share on social media. Before you hit "Post," imagine how your boss and most conservative coworkers (and your grandmother) would react if they saw your post. Self-monitoring is your friend.

These guidelines seem obvious, but most of us know people who have violated them. Don't be one of those people—for your job's sake.

Stand Up for Each Other

A loyal friend "has your back"—both when you're present and when you're not. Few things are more endearing than a friend who defends your rights, honor, and reputation. A friend will also celebrate your achievements to others so you don't have to toot your own horn. (Social media can be a good outlet for this.)

Honor Pledges and Commitments

"You can count on me" and "I'll be there for you" are common friendship sentiments (Galupo & Gonzalez, 2013). These pledges, however, need to be backed up with actions. Whether it's showing up on time, attending a scheduled event, or fulfilling an agreement about a shared task, it's vital for friends to live up to their promises and obligations.

Treat Each Other with Respect

Sometimes we say the most hurtful things to people we care about the most (Zhang & Stafford, 2009). It's easy for banter in a friendship to slip into teasing that hurts and comments that sting (Jin, 2013). Good friends

monitor their words and actions, making sure to communicate in ways that affirm the other person's dignity.

Have a Balanced Exchange

Social exchange theory (page 262) tells us that the rewards of a relationship need to outweigh the costs. This is as true in friendships as it is in other close relationships (Haselton & Galperin, 2013). College students in one study identified "Don't take more than you give" as an important friendship rule (Baxter et al., 2001).

Value Both Connection and Autonomy

In Chapter 9, we described how all interpersonal relationships struggle with competing needs for both closeness and independence. In essence, we have a need to spend time with our friends and to spend time away from them. Allow your friends space to develop their own identity and nurture other relationships—and also the freedom to make choices that might not match your own.

In the TV series *Stranger Things*, young friends communicate their loyalty and support for one another in a variety of ways, including maintaining confidences, lending a hand, and even apologizing and forgiving. ***What long-running friendships do you have, and how were those friendships forged?***

Apologize and Forgive

Sooner or later friends are bound to make the kinds of "relational transgressions" described in Chapter 9 (pages 284–285). As you read there, a good apology has several components, including *sincerely* expressing remorse, admitting wrongdoing, promising to behave better, and requesting forgiveness. When you're the one who has been wronged, granting forgiveness can help repair the friendship and leave you feeling better than holding a grudge (Merolla, 2008).

COMMUNICATION IN THE FAMILY

A few generations ago, "What is a family?" was an easy question to answer for most people. Common notions of a family in the Western world typically stressed shared residence, producing or adopting children by different-sexed adults, and a "socially approved sexual relationship" (Murdock, 1965, p. 1). A more recent study of college students found that their definitions of family contained many of these same elements (Baxter et al., 2009). However, social scientists, lawyers, judges, theologians, and the public at large have begun to broaden their understanding. Newer issues include adoption by same-sex couples and parenthood when there is an egg or sperm donor.

After reviewing a century's worth of definitions, Kathleen Galvin and her colleagues (2007) define family broadly enough to include many types of relationships. According to them, a **family** is a system with two or more interdependent people who have a common history and a present reality

Media Clip

Voluntary Families: *Finding Dory*

As a baby, blue tang fish Dory (voiced by Ellen DeGeneres) is separated from her parents. Challenged by a short-term memory loss, she can't find her way back home. Ultimately, Dory enlists an eccentric menagerie of sea creatures in her quest to locate the parents she barely remembers but misses terribly.

As Dory searches for her mother and father, she discovers what communication scholar Dawn Braithwaite calls a "voluntary family." She develops a strong sense of shared identity and belonging with the creatures who help her (Peterson, 2016).

Dory is fortunate to find her loving parents by tale's end. But this Pixar adventure offers encouragement for those who lack a supportive family network: It's possible to build a voluntary one, joined by what Braithwaite calls "the ties of affection."

and who expect to influence each other in the future. With this broader definition in mind, communication scholars contend that families are defined primarily through their interaction rather than through biological relationship or kinship systems.

CREATING THE FAMILY THROUGH COMMUNICATION

Families are based on, formed, and maintained through communication (Galvin, 2015). It's through communication that family members create mental models of family life, and through communication those models endure over time and across generations (Vangelisti, 2004). The following sections describe several ways that communication shapes and constitutes the family.

Family Narratives

Chapter 4 (pages 108–109) explains how shared narratives provide a story line that keeps relationships operating harmoniously. Narratives are especially important in families, as they serve a variety of functions that include reinforcing shared goals, teaching moral values, and stressing family concerns (Galvin et al., 2007).

Family stories often have meaning that goes beyond the incident being recounted (Kellas & Horstman, 2015). Some might reflect beliefs about work ("I walked up the hill both ways, in the snow, barefoot"), family identity ("We've been leaders in this community for decades"), and warnings ("You don't want to end up like so-and-so, do you?"). Narratives may reflect a family's view of how members relate to one another: "We help each other a lot," or "We are proud of our heritage." Others reflect values about how to operate in the world: "It's impossible to be successful without a good education," or "It's our responsibility to help others less fortunate than ourselves." Even dysfunctional families can be united by a shared narrative: "We can never get along."

One study showed that families who regularly engage in positive storytelling (focusing on achievements and using "we" language) have high levels of family functioning and satisfaction (Kellas, 2005). These narratives are often remembered and relived. Newlyweds report that sayings of their parents ("Love doesn't just happen—it requires work") ring in their ears and offer them guidance (Jackl, 2016). More particularly, daughters

remember stories their mothers told them about love, and they use that information to shape their own romantic relationships (Kellas, 2010). In other words, families narrate their best and worst life experiences and pass them down from generation to generation (Kiser et al., 2010).

Stop for a moment and think of a story you've heard—maybe several times—at your family gatherings. What does that narrative say about how your family operates? What is the underlying moral to the story? How has that influenced the way you see the world and communicate with others? It's quite likely you've been shaped by family stories more than you realize.

Consider the stereotypical family roles in the long-running TV series *The Simpsons*: the oafish father, the kindly mother, the mischievous son, the responsible daughter. ***How would you characterize their communication rituals, rules, and patterns?***

Communication Rituals and Rules

Rituals are another way family is created through communication (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2006a). Some rituals center on celebrations: special family meals, certain types of gifts, the post-Thanksgiving touch football game, and so on. Other rituals are part of everyday life: good-natured teasing about family members' quirks, or saying "I love you" at the end of every phone conversation.

Rituals aren't the only way that families create their own communication systems. As unique cultures, families also have their own rules about a variety of communication practices. Some communication rules are explicit: "If you're going to be more than a half hour late, phone home." Other rules aren't ever discussed, but they are just as important: "If Mom slams the door after coming home from work, wait until she's had time to relax before speaking to her." Some rules govern communication within the family (Caughlin & Petronio, 2004): How far is it okay to push challenges of parental decisions? What kinds of language are allowed and forbidden? How much kidding and teasing are acceptable? Are there any forbidden topics?

One study (Baxter & Akkoor, 2011) showed that some topics of conversation are allowed and encouraged in most families, whereas others are discouraged, if not off limits. For example, both parents and children agreed that conversations about friendships and everyday matters were fine. On the other hand, topics related to sex, drinking, money, and how teens were doing academically fell into the second group.

Stepfamilies often have their own unique rules. Tamara Golish (2000) interviewed 115 adolescents and young adults in stepfamilies to learn about topics they tend to avoid with their parents and stepparents. Stepchildren reported more topic avoidance with their stepparents than with their parents. In particular, stepchildren say they often avoid "deep conversations" or talking about money and family issues with their stepparents. One factor affecting the comfort level in stepfamily communication is the type of parenting style used by the stepparents. Stepchildren feel

more dissatisfied and avoid more topics with stepparents who are highly authoritarian (i.e., demanding and rigid). Interestingly, stepchildren also say they are dissatisfied with highly permissive stepparents.

See if you can identify the rituals and rules in your family of origin. How are they communicated? How are they enforced, and what happens when they're violated? How have they affected the way you communicate with those outside your family, such as roommates?

PATTERNS OF FAMILY COMMUNICATION

Whatever form families take, the communication that occurs within them shares some important characteristics, which we examine now.

Families as Communication Systems

Every family has its own unique ways of communicating. Despite these differences, all families are **systems**: groups whose members interact with one another to form a whole. Families, like all systems, possess a number of characteristics that shape the way members communicate (Galvin et al., 2007; Lerner et al., 2002).

Family Members Are Interdependent If you touch one piece of a hanging sculpture or wind chime, all the other parts will move in response. In the same way, one family member's feelings and behaviors affect all the other members. If, for example, one family member leaves home to marry, or a parent loses a job, or feuding siblings stop talking to one another, the system is no longer the same. Each event is a reaction to the family's history, and each event shapes future interaction.

A Family Is More Than the Sum of Its Parts Even if you knew each member separately, you still wouldn't understand the family system until you saw the members interact. When those members are together, new ways of communicating emerge. For instance, you may have known friends who turned into very different people when they became a couple. Maybe they became better as individuals—more confident, clever, and happy. Or perhaps they became more aggressive and defensive. Likewise, the nature of a couple's relationship is likely to change when a child arrives, and that family's interaction will change again with the arrival of each subsequent baby.

Family members interact in combinations of ways. ***What subsystems operate in your family? How are members of your family interdependent?***

Families Have Systems Within the Larger System Like boxes within boxes, families have subsystems (systems within the family). For example, a traditional family of four can have six communication subsystems with two people: mother and father, mother and son, mother and daughter, father and son, father and daughter, and daughter and son. If you add three-person subsystems to these six (e.g., mother, father, and daughter), the number

of combinations is even greater. The nuclear family itself is a subsystem of larger suprasystems (systems of which the family is a part) that include aunts and uncles, cousins, grandparents, in-laws, and so on.

A study investigated the systemic nature of family interaction (Galovan et al., 2013). Spouses reported higher marital quality when they were equally responsible for family tasks. Which shared task best predicted marital satisfaction? Responsibility for child rearing. In other words, if parents want to improve their relationship with each other, one way to do so is to be more invested in the care of their children. A change in one part of the family system (parent–child interaction) affects other parts of the system (spouse–spouse interaction).

Conversation and Conformity in the Family

Ascan Koerner and Mary Ann Fitzpatrick (2006; see also Koerner & Schrodt, 2014) have identified two categories of rules about communication in the family: conversation and conformity.

Conversation orientation involves the degree to which families favor an open climate of discussion on a wide array of topics. Families with a high conversation orientation interact freely, frequently, and spontaneously, without many limitations regarding topic or time spent interacting. Conversation-oriented families enjoy telling family narratives and strengthen their bonds by doing so (Thompson & Schrodt, 2015). By contrast, members of families with a low conversation orientation do not often interact or discuss their thoughts and feelings with one another. Families with a strong conversation orientation regard communication as rewarding (Avtgis, 1999), and children who grow up in such families have a greater range of interpersonal skills in their later relationships (Koesten, 2004).

Conformity orientation refers to how much a family stresses uniformity of values, beliefs, and attitudes. High-conformity families seek harmony, interdependence, and obedience. They are often hierarchical, with a clear sense that some members have more authority than others. By contrast, communication in families with a low conformity orientation is characterized by individuality, independence, and equality.

Conversation and conformity orientations can combine in four ways, as shown in Figure 10.1. Each of these modes reflects a different **family communication pattern**: typical interaction processes described as consensual, pluralistic, protective, or laissez-faire. To understand these combinations, imagine four different families. In each, a 15-year-old daughter wants to get a very visible and irreverent tattoo that concerns the parents. Now imagine how communication surrounding this issue would differ depending on the various combinations of conversation and conformity orientations:

- *Consensual* families are high in both conversation orientation and conformity orientation. Communication in these families reflects the tension between the pressure to agree and preserve the hierarchy, and an interest in open communication and exploration. In a consensual family, the daughter would feel

FIGURE 10.1 Family Communication Patterns

comfortable making her case for the tattoo, and the parents would be willing to hear the daughter out. Ultimately the decision would rest with the parents.

- *Pluralistic* families are high in conversation orientation and low in conformity orientation. Communication in these families is open and unrestrained, with all family members' contributions evaluated on their own merits. It's easy to visualize an ongoing family discussion about whether the tattoo is a good idea. Older and younger siblings—and maybe even other relatives—would weigh in with their perspectives. In the best of worlds, a decision would emerge from these discussions.
- *Protective* families are low in conversation orientation and high in conformity orientation. Communication in these families emphasizes obedience to authority and the reluctance to share thoughts and feelings. In a protective family, there would be little if any discussion about the tattoo. The parents would decide, and their word would be final.
- *Laissez-faire* families are low in both conversation orientation and conformity orientation. Communication in these families reflects family members' lack of involvement with each other, emotional distance, and individual decision making. In this type of family, the parents would have little to say about their daughter's desire to get a tattoo. With this issue—and most others—their response would be "Whatever" (if she even brought it up for discussion).

Which of these four patterns best represents your family? Which would you *like* to be true of your family? You can use the Assessing Your Communication instrument on page 307 to help determine your family's communication pattern. As you complete the assessment, keep in mind that family members may disagree on how their family is classified (Baxter & Pederson, 2013), so it may be interesting to have each member of your family complete it. For the record, more families identify as consensual or pluralistic than as protective or laissez-faire (Keating, 2016).

A growing body of research suggests that some communication patterns are more productive and satisfying than others (Schrodt & Shimkowski, 2017). For example, young adults from consensual and pluralistic families are more confident listeners and more intellectually flexible than those from protective and laissez-faire backgrounds (Ledbetter & Schrodt, 2008). Offspring from pluralistic families are less verbally aggressive than those from any other type (Schrodt & Carr, 2012). By contrast, a protective parental approach leads to more emotional suppression in children (Shimkowski, 2016), and to lower satisfaction for all members of a family (Ledbetter & Vik, 2012). Fathers tend to be confrontational and pressuring during conflicts in high-conformity families, but they're peacemaking and analytic in pluralistic ones (Sillars et al., 2014). In other words, open communication and shared decision making produce better results than do power plays and refusal to have open dialogue.

ASSESSING YOUR COMMUNICATION

Your Family's Communication Pattern

Presented here is a list of statements that describe family communication. With your family in mind, rate your agreement with each statement on a scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 = "strongly disagree" and 5 = "strongly agree."

Conversation Orientation

_____ **1.** In our family we often talk about controversial topics like politics and religion.

_____ **2.** My parents often ask my opinion when the family is talking about something.

_____ **3.** I can tell my parents almost anything.

_____ **4.** In our family we often talk about our feelings and emotions.

_____ **5.** My parents and I often have long, relaxed conversations about nothing in particular.

_____ **6.** In our family, we often talk about our plans and hopes for the future.

Conformity Orientation

_____ **7.** In our home, my parents usually have the last word.

_____ **8.** My parents sometimes become irritated with my views if different from theirs.

_____ **9.** If my parents don't approve of it, they don't want to know about it.

_____ **10.** When I am at home, I am expected to obey my parents' rules.

_____ **11.** My parents often say things like "You'll know better when you grow up."

_____ **12.** My parents often say things like "You should give in on arguments rather than risk making people mad."

Adapted from Koroshnia, M. M., & Latifian, M. M. (2008). An investigation on validity and reliability of Revised Family Communication Patterns instrument. *Journal of Family Research, 3*, 855–875; and Fife, E. M., Leigh Nelson, C. C., & Messersmith, A. S. (2014). The influence of family communication patterns on religious orientation among college students. *Journal of Family Communication, 14*, 72–84.

For scoring information, see page 321 at the end of the chapter.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN FAMILIES

It's one thing to identify a family's communication pattern; it's another to improve it. This section identifies ways for families to better manage their communication.

Manage the Connection–Autonomy Dialectic

As you read in Chapter 9 (pages 273–278), dialectical tensions arise in relationships when two opposing or incompatible forces exist simultaneously. The connection–autonomy dialectic is particularly challenging for families.

As children grow into adolescents, the "leave me alone" orientation becomes apparent. Teenagers who used to happily spend time with their parents now may groan at the thought of a family vacation, or even the notion of sitting down at the dinner table each evening. They spend more time alone or with friends. Often, answering the question "Who am I?" requires challenging family rules and beliefs, establishing powerful nonfamily relationships, and weakening family bonds. But through conflict, hopefully, an answer emerges; adolescents can then reestablish good relationships with family members.

Families who are most successful at negotiating this difficult period tend to be those with high flexibility—who, for example, can change how they discipline and how they determine family roles. Helpful practices include discussing rules and roles, minimizing criticism during times of exploration, emphasizing care despite conflict, and encouraging responsibility. "The quality of the communication between parents and adolescents is a critical feature of all these tasks" (Noller, 1995, p. 106).

When young adults move out of the family home, they need to consider how to stay connected. For example, they must decide how often to call home and visit, and they must find ways to maintain open lines of communication with their parents—perhaps in part through social networking sites (Stephenson-Abetz & Holman, 2012). Studies of young adults show that their communication patterns with their parents after moving out usually reflect their prior patterns. For example, young adults from conversation-oriented families tend to remain open with their parents about everything from credit card use (Thorson & Horstman, 2014) to more intimate matters (Ledbetter & Vik, 2012). In one study, first-year college students reported that communication with their fathers had improved when they moved out (Rossetto et al., 2017). They said their dads became more supportive and expressive, and often less controlling.

Moving out has a ripple effect on the family of origin. Relationships between siblings often change at this stage. A study found that siblings may gain a newfound affinity once they are separated—and that communication sometimes increases, as "absence makes the heart grow fonder" (Halliwell, 2016). Dynamics also change among the family members still at home. For example, the parents and remaining children may need to renegotiate their task and social roles. (For example, if the child who moved out had helped resolve conflicts among family members, how will that happen now?)

Finally, communication between older parents and their adult children provides its own set of challenges. In many families, interaction comes full circle, as the children must provide for their parents while simultaneously meeting the obligations of their jobs and their own immediate families (Kees et al., 2007). Daughters who take care of elderly family members report being more satisfied when this relationship allows for autonomy (Semlak & Pearson, 2011). When there's too much connection, caretakers can lose their sense of freedom and identity.

FOCUS ON RESEARCH

Parental Disclosures with Adult Children

It's a norm in many families for parents to shield their young children from difficult news, including financial problems, medical issues, or relational challenges. But when those children become adults, how much do parents disclose?

A team led by Erin Donovan asked 298 undergraduate students to describe a time when one of their parents shared important information with them. Sensitive topics included the loss of a job, an impending move, parental illness, death of a loved one, and family turbulence. The researchers asked the participants to describe the conversation, what elements contributed to its success or failure, and how it affected their relationship with the disclosing parent.

A qualitative analysis of the data found that adult children valued three things in these types of conversations: (1) access to information, (2) candor, and (3) relating as peers. One participant described the effects of *not* being treated this way by her mother about some medical news:

> I called her to ask how her tests had gone and she explained that they went fine. Then the next day I talked to her, she explained that she had lied to me the day before and one of her tests had come back with an abnormality. I was devastated because she tried to hide it from me.

When parents opened up in ways that showed an appreciation for their adult child's maturity, their children rated the communication as more successful. In a follow-up study, the researchers confirmed that parental openness and honesty increased feelings of relational closeness with their children. Young adults don't want to be treated like kids by their parents; they would rather be talked to as peers.

Donovan, E. E., Thompson, C. M., LeFebvre, L., & Tollison, A. C. (2017). Emerging adult confidants' judgments of parental openness: Disclosure quality and post-disclosure relational closeness. *Communication Monographs, 84*, 179–199.

Strive for Closeness While Respecting Boundaries

In Chapter 9, we described the conflicting needs we all have for both integration and separation in our relationships as well as for both expression and privacy. Nowhere are these opposing drives stronger than in families. We all know the importance of keeping close ties with our kin, although too much cohesion can be a problem.

Families cope with these dialectical tensions by creating **boundaries**—limits on family members' actions. *Communication privacy management theory* considers the importance of boundary management in interpersonal and family relationships (Petronio, 2000, 2013). The most obvious boundaries are physical (e.g., don't enter a bedroom without knocking if the door is closed; stay out of the garage when Dad is tinkering with the car). Other boundaries involve conversational topics. In some families, discussion of politics or religion is off limits. In others, health issues are kept private (Ebersole & Hernandez, 2016). Sex is one of the most-avoided topics with parents and stepparents (Golish & Caughlin, 2002). Money is also a delicate subject in many families. Adult children who care for their elderly parents report that boundaries about finances often remain "thick," even when caretakers need access to their parents' financial accounts (Plander, 2013).

In addition to governing what to talk about, boundaries can also dictate how topics are handled. In some families it is fine to persist if the first

overture to discussion is rebuffed ("Come on, what's on your mind?"). In other families, privacy rules discourage this kind of persistence. Sometimes these boundaries need to be openly negotiated. At other times they are established through trial and error. In either case, healthy boundaries allow us to balance the opposing and equally important needs for connection and autonomy, for openness and closedness.

Use, but Don't Abuse, Technology and Social Media

Changing technologies affect family communication, often in positive ways (Carvalho et al., 2015). For instance, participants in one study (Crosswhite et al., 2014) said that texting has given them an increased sense of connection with family members and has had a positive impact on their familial relationships (women expressed this more strongly than men). Participants also said they could express their feelings to family members more honestly via text than in person. Email provides similar connection opportunities (Stern & Messer, 2009), although that medium is more popular with parents than it is with their children. And many senior citizens are logging on to social media so they can stay in communication with their extended families (Jung & Sundar, 2016).

Social networking sites provide new challenges for family privacy management. Decisions to send or accept a friend request, unfriend, or block family members are essentially boundary issues. Privacy settings can limit access for particular family members. Studies show that adolescents engage in more self-disclosure but use fewer privacy settings than adults do (Christofides et al., 2012), which is why many of them are reluctant to accept a parent's friend request. Adolescents who agree to share online social networks with their parents report stronger relational bonds (Coyne et al., 2014). Conversely, those who deny parents access tend to have higher levels of aggression and delinquency and lower levels of connectedness. Although the cause–effect relationship isn't clear, it appears that sharing portions of a social network with one's parents is associated with a variety of positive outcomes for adolescents.

As teens transition into adulthood, they become less concerned about social media privacy with their parents (Child & Westermann, 2013). Young adults who become online friends with their parents are more likely to be female and to come from families with a high conversation orientation (Ball et al., 2013). Those from lower conversation orientations are more likely to adjust their privacy settings once they add their parents as friends. Regardless of age or orientation, it's important for family members to communicate social networking expectations. This might include negotiating rules such as "Don't post pictures of me from my childhood" or "If you have something personal to say, please do it through private messaging."

Encourage Confirming Messages

In Chapter 12, we describe the importance of confirming messages—ones that show in one way or another that we value the other person. Confirming messages from parents help satisfy a great many of their children's needs, such as the need for nurturance and respect. One researcher (Ellis, 2002) looked at the different ways parents communicate valuing and support to

their children. She found that two highly confirming behaviors parents offer are (1) telling their children that they are unique and valuable as human beings and (2) genuinely listening. Two highly disconfirming behaviors are (1) belittling their children and (2) making statements that devalue their children's ideas: "Nobody asked for your opinion," or "What do you know about this anyway?"

Confirming messages are just as important for older children as for young ones. One study found a strong relationship between the amount of confirmation adolescents feel and the openness they exhibit in communication with their parents (Dailey, 2006). College students are more likely to reveal their risky behavior to their family members when they think the response is likely to be confirming (Aldeis & Afifi, 2013). This doesn't mean that parents must agree with every choice their child makes, but it's important to create a communication climate that allows for open, honest discussions—particularly once the child reaches adulthood (Donovan et al., 2016).

Siblings can also be a source of confirming messages. Research shows that sibling relationships can offer vital support throughout our lives (Rittenour et al., 2007), and thus it's important to maintain them through behaviors such as sharing tasks, expressing positivity, and offering assurances (Myers, 2003). Another way older siblings can nurture their relationships is by talking about their family: reminiscing about their childhood, crazy family events, and wild relatives. Sharing these stories not only holds the siblings together, but also helps them clarify family events and validate their feelings and life choices (McGoldrick & Watson, 2016).

COMMUNICATION IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Chapter 1 (pages 5–6) identifies numerous studies showing that interpersonal relationships promote mental, emotional, and physical health. One research review (Loving & Slatcher, 2013) more specifically describes the connection between *romantic* unions and well-being. In short, people in loving romantic relationships live longer, happier, healthier lives. Unfortunately, the ending of romantic partnerships—or being in distressed intimate relationships—is linked to increases in illness, depression, and even death rates.

In a study of more than 2,200 participants recruited by couples' therapists and counselors, "communication" was rated the most important competency for ensuring success in romantic relationships—more than sex and romantic passion or any other factor (Epstein, Warfel, et al., 2013). Moreover, divorced couples cited "communication problems" as the primary challenge in their defunct marriages (Williamson et al., 2016). This section will focus on communication in romantic relationships, broadly defined as longer term, loving connections between partners. These relationships can include couples who are dating exclusively, partners who live together, and spouses who have been married for years. The crucial issue is whether the people involved identify themselves as being romantically connected.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

"Are we 'just friends' or something more?" It's not unusual for couples to ask questions such as this to determine if they're moving into a romantic relationship. Although the lines of demarcation aren't always clear, in this section we look at three characteristics that typify most romantic relationships: love, commitment, and affection. As you'll see, these concepts overlap (for instance, commitment and affection are components of love in one of the models in this section). The three categories are used here as a way to focus on the research about each of these related topics.

Love

More than two millennia ago, Aristotle maintained that "Love is composed of a single soul inhabiting two bodies." His mentor, Plato, was a bit more cynical: "Love is a serious mental disease." Philosophers and artists through the years have waxed eloquently about love, with mixed conclusions about its joys and sorrows.

Social scientists have studied love as well, recognizing that it's a force that draws most people into romantic relationships. One researcher (Fehr, 2013) puts it this way:

> Love plays a powerful role in people's lives, determining how satisfied they are in a relationship, how committed they are to it, and, at least in premarital relationships, whether or not the relationship continues. (p. 228)

A helpful model is Robert Sternberg's (2004) **triangular theory of love**. He maintains that love has three components:

Intimacy: This is the closeness and connectedness one feels in a relationship. Intimacy can be found and expressed in all the relational contexts described in this chapter. Using temperature as an analogy, Sternberg regards intimacy as the "warm" component of love.

Passion: This involves physical attraction and emotional arousal, often including sexuality. This is the "hot" component of love.

Commitment: This is the rational side of love, involving decisions to maintain a relationship over time (more on this later). This is love's "cool" component.

Figure 10.2 depicts these three components as corners of a triangle and identifies seven possible combinations resulting from their intersection. It's easy to imagine the communication patterns that accompany each form of love represented in the model. For instance, couples experiencing *romantic love* might exchange highly emotional messages ("I adore you" in a clutched embrace), with many displays of affection. *Companionate love* would be more verbally and nonverbally subdued, with phrases such as "I enjoy your company" more typical. And *empty love* would be a shell of a relationship, void of most if not all affectionate messages described later in this section.

It's healthy for loving couples to have both companionate and romantic affection for each other (VanderDrift et al., 2013). Sternberg

FIGURE 10.2 Components of Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love

acknowledges that *consummate love*—the combination of intimacy, passion, and commitment—is an ideal that's rare to achieve and challenging to maintain. Typically, love's components wax and wane over the course of a relationship. There can be rushes of passion on occasion; at other times, love is more a cool decision than a warm feeling. Maturity is also a factor in the experience of love. For instance, adolescents don't identify with the triangle components as well as adults do (Sumter et al., 2013). As couples age, they tend to value commitment more than the other components, although long-term partners experience more passion and intimacy than some stereotypes suggest (Acevedo & Aron, 2009).

If you consider romantic partnerships you've been in or observed, you can probably think of examples of all the types of love depicted in the triangular model. You can also likely see how the factors ebb and flow over time. Similar to the models of relational stages and dialectics described in Chapter 9, it's healthy to regard love as a dynamic and changing process rather than a static property.

Commitment

How important is the role of commitment in romantic relationships? Sentiments such as the following suggest an answer: "I'm looking for a committed relationship." "I'm just not ready for commitment." "I'm committed to making this relationship work."

Relational commitment involves a promise—sometimes implied and sometimes explicit—to remain in a relationship and to make that relationship successful. Commitment is both formed and reinforced through communication. Table 10.1 on page 314 spells out commitment indicators in romantic relationships. Research shows that couples who regularly communicate their commitment have more positive feelings about their relationship and experience less relational uncertainty (Weigel et al., 2011). Some of that communication is private; some is public. For instance, posting on a partner's social networking site can be a commitment marker, and a sign that the relationship has staying power (Toma & Choi, 2015).

TABLE 10.1 Major Indicators of Commitment in a Romantic Relationship

- Providing affection
- Providing support
- Maintaining integrity
- Sharing companionship
- Making an effort to communicate regularly
- Showing respect
- Creating a relational future
- Creating a positive relational atmosphere
- Working on relationship problems together
- Reassuring one's commitment

Source: Weigel, D. J. (2008). Mutuality and the communication of commitment in romantic relationships. *Southern Communication Journal, 73*, 24–41.

As Table 10.1 indicates, words alone aren't a surefire measure of true commitment. Deeds are also important. Simply saying "You can count on me" doesn't guarantee loyalty. But without language, commitment may not be clear. For this reason, ceremonies formalizing relationships are an important way to recognize and cement commitment (see Chapter 9's discussion of "bonding" on page 270).

A cultural note about commitment: It's a decidedly Western approach to view commitment as a culmination of romantic love (as the familiar chant goes, "First comes love, then comes marriage"). Many of the world's marriages are arranged, and their axiom is "first comes marriage, then comes love." In a study of satisfied couples in arranged marriages, "commitment" was identified as the most important factor that helped their love flourish over time (Epstein, Pandit, et al. 2013). The second most important factor was "communication," with a strong emphasis on self-disclosure as a means to learn to love one's mate. Regardless of the order, there is a strong relationship between commitment and communication in successful romantic relationships.

Affection

Expressions of affection—both verbal and nonverbal—are typical in romantic relationships. These can range from holding hands to saying "I love you" to sexual activity. Romantic affection is often communicated privately; sometimes it's expressed publicly. In fact, the phrase "public displays of affection" has its own acronym (PDA) and social rules (Watson, 2016).

Communicating affection is beneficial for romantic partners in a variety of ways (Hesse & Mikkelson, 2017). In one study (Floyd et al., 2009), married and cohabiting couples were asked to increase their amount of romantic kissing over a six-week period. In comparison with a control group, the frequent kissers experienced improvements not only in their stress levels and relational satisfaction, but also in their cholesterol counts (you probably want to know how to sign up for studies like these). Other research shows similar physiological benefits of expressing affection

verbally, both in person and in writing (Floyd & Riforgiate, 2008). In terms of relational benefits, received affection works like a bank account—when a loved one has made plenty of deposits, the partner is more willing to overlook a transgression than when the affection account is depleted (Horan, 2012).

There can be discrepancies between feelings and expressions of affection. Perhaps you can recall times when you texted "Love u" despite not feeling very charitable toward your partner. Maybe you gave your partner a hug or a kiss in the midst of a disagreement, even though it didn't match your emotional state. Communication researchers call these acts of "deceptive affection" and say they're common in romantic relationships (Horan & Booth-Butterfield, 2013). Rather than being negative, deceptions of this sort can be a normal part of relational maintenance and support. Research shows that they may also be more powerful than you realize. Engaging in romantic actions, such as gazing into a lover's eyes, sitting at intimate distances, or sharing personal secrets, can often lead to romantic feelings, rather than the other way around (Epstein, 2010).

Sexual activity is an important means of expressing and receiving affection in most romantic relationships. The strongest and most reliable predictor of sexual satisfaction is relational satisfaction (Diamond, 2013). In other words, sex is best enjoyed as part of a healthy romantic relationship. Communication also plays an important role: There is a strong correlation between a couple's communication skills and their sexual satisfaction (Byers, 2011). And contrary to some media depictions of passionate sex occurring in wordless vacuums, sexual activity is more satisfying when accompanied by direct verbal communication ("Here's how I feel"; "This is what I want"), both before and during the encounter (Theiss & Solomon, 2007). Positive disclosures after sex, often referred to as "pillow talk," help build trust, satisfaction, and

Media Clip

Maybe "I Do," Maybe I Don't: *Married at First Sight*

The premise of the reality series *Married at First Sight* is simple: Strangers, paired by "relationship experts," agree to marry when they meet. After a honeymoon trip and a month of living together, they decide to stay married or get divorced. Of course, managing their relationships under the watchful eyes of an audience is anything but simple.

The first few seasons saw more failures than successes. The majority of the relationships ended in divorce or a later separation. Although some might see this as an indictment of arranged marriages, these reality show experiments don't have the support of family, culture, and tradition that typify most arranged relationships (many of which are long-lasting).

Many of the troubled couples identified communication as a major sticking point. Sometimes this had to do with not sharing meaning or values; other times it meant not communicating responsibly about thoughts and feelings. Even with coaching from counselors, some of the partners found it challenging to talk and listen effectively to each other.

There are versions of the show in several countries, some of which will include gay couples in their pairings. It remains to be seen whether culture or sexual orientation will have an impact on the success rate of these matchups. In any case, one thing seems clear from this show: A successful romantic relationship requires more than just interpersonal similarity and saying "I do."

closeness (Denes, 2012). When those conversations are uncomfortable, satisfied lovers often use face-saving communication and even humor to express themselves (Miller-Ott & Linder, 2013).

It may come as a surprise that not all people in romantic relationships desire sexual activity. There are those whose orientation is "romantic asexual," and coming out for these individuals can be challenging (Robbins et al., 2016). Experts suggest that it's helpful for asexual people to find like-minded others to help them navigate talking about their orientation.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

The preceding section identified some ways to improve communication in romantic relationships, such as conversing about commitment and displaying affection. Here are two more ways to enhance romantic interaction.

Learning Love Languages

"If you love me, please listen."
"If you love me, say so."
"If you love me, show me."

The underlying message in statements such as these is, "Here is what love means to me." Author Gary Chapman (2010) contends that each person has a **love language**: a particular notion of what counts as love. He suggests that we get into trouble when we fail to recognize that our way of expressing love may not match our partner's.

Chapman identifies five love languages in romantic relationships, and research offers support for their being related to effective relational maintenance (Egbert & Polk, 2006). Although they're not technically "languages," the term is used to suggest that these five categories are means of communication:

- *Words of affirmation:* These include compliments, words of praise, verbal support, written notes or letters, or other ways of saying that a person is valued and appreciated. People who use this love language are easily hurt by insults or ridicule, or when their efforts aren't verbally acknowledged.
- *Quality time:* This is about being present and available for your partner and giving that person your complete, undivided attention for a significant period. Being inattentive or distracted takes the "quality" out of time spent together.
- *Gifts:* People who measure love in terms of gifts believe "it's the thought that counts." A gift needn't be expensive to be meaningful; the best ones show that you know the recipient well. To gift-oriented partners, neglecting to honor an important event is a transgression.
- *Acts of service:* Taking out the trash, filling the car with gas, doing laundry—the list of chores that can be acts of service is endless. Similar to gifts, the key to service is knowing which acts would be most

appreciated by your partner. (Hint: It's probably the chore that your partner hates most.)

- *Physical touch:* Although this might include sexual activity, meaningful touch can also include other expressions of affection: an arm around the shoulder, a held hand, a brush of the cheek, or a neck rub.

Partners understandably but mistakenly can assume that the love language they prefer is also the one the other will appreciate. For example, if your primary love language is "gifts," then you probably expect presents from loved ones on special occasions—and perhaps even on ordinary ones. You're also likely to give gifts regularly and assume that they'll be received appreciatively.

As you can imagine, the assumption that your partner speaks the same love language as you can be a setup for disappointment. Chapman (2010) says this is often the case in marriages:

> We tend to speak our primary love language, and we become confused when our spouse does not understand what we are communicating. We are expressing our love, but the message does not come through because we are speaking what, to them, is a foreign language. (p. 15)

Most people learn love languages in their family of origin. To a degree, then, we're imprinted with ways to give and receive affection from an early age (Davis & Haynes, 2012). The good news is that we can learn to communicate love in different ways, especially with help from our romantic partners. Take a look at the types of love languages in the preceding list and see if you can identify your primary style. You can then ask your partner to do the same and compare notes.

Managing Digital Communication

As you read in Chapter 9, it's no longer unusual for romantic relationships to begin online. But even couples who initiate their romance in person need to manage their use of digital communication. One study found that 27 percent of online adults in romantic partnerships say that online communication has had an impact on their relationships (Lenhart & Duggan, 2014). Not all of that impact is positive. About a quarter of cell phone owners in the study said the phone distracts their romantic partners when they are alone together (the percentage is even higher for young adults, ages 18–29). The conclusion of the Focus on Research sidebar on page 275 bears repeating: Couples are wise to negotiate rules about using (or not using) mobile devices when they're together (Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2015).

Digital communication can be more than a mere distraction to a romantic relationship. In a broad overview of U.S. demographic data, researchers found a correlation between social network use, marital dissatisfaction, and divorce (Valenzuela et al., 2014). Social networking habits in particular emerged as "a significant predictor of divorce rate and spousal troubles." The authors make clear, however, that social

DARK SIDE OF COMMUNICATION

Virtually Unfaithful: Emotional Infidelity Online

Infidelity has been a fact of life as long as romance has existed. In the digital age, some people are "virtually unfaithful," engaging in romantic relationships online while in a face-to-face relationship with someone else (McDaniel et al., 2017). Researchers have begun to study whether mediated infidelity is as damaging as the in-person variety. Here are some of their findings:

- A majority of university students in one study—both men and women—believed that infidelity in an online relationship is just as much of a betrayal as cheating in person (Whitty, 2005). In another study (Henline et al., 2007), both men and women regarded emotional infidelity as *more* distressing than cheating sexually.
- In heterosexual relationships, women generally regard online unfaithfulness as a more serious relational transgression than men do (Dijkstra et al., 2013; Docan-Morgan & Docan, 2007).
- Family therapists view online infidelity as a significant issue in contemporary romantic relationships (Cravens et al., 2013). They note that partners who are cheated on often need clinical treatment for trauma (Schneider et al., 2012).

Research such as this provides a warning about the dangers of online romance. Flirting with someone online—even if there's no physical involvement—can jeopardize committed face-to-face relationships.

media may not be a *cause* as much as a *symptom* of relational problems in that "men and women troubled by their marriage may turn to social media for emotional support." The Dark Side box on this page describes how online infidelity can pose serious problems for some couples. A helpful rule of thumb is to regularly include your romantic partner in your social media postings—as a message to both your loved one and those who are following (Saslow et al., 2013).

There's plenty of good news about romantic communication and technology. As Chapter 9 explained, communicating via texting, instant messaging, and social media can be an ingredient of relational maintenance (Tong & Walther, 2011b). One reason text-based digital channels are so effective is that lovers can craft their messages to convey just the right expression of affection and immediacy (Wells & Dennis, 2016). In addition, edited messages allow communicators to perceive and present idealized versions of themselves, free of poor manners, stumbling speech, and other bad habits (Jiang & Hancock, 2013). Although handwritten love letters may be a thing of the past, typed words of affection still make an impact—and most digital messages can be stored and reread. If there's a special text you've saved, an email you've archived, or a social media post you revisit, then you understand the power of written words to maintain a romantic relationship.

Mobile devices make it easier than ever to stay in touch with loved ones. Is it possible to communicate too much and too often with a romantic partner? Unfortunately, yes. There's a point where constant calls and texts can seem like an invasion of privacy (Ngcongo, 2016), and where sweetness feels like surveillance (McEwan & Horn, 2016). This returns us to a familiar maxim in this book: all things in moderation. When overused and abused, social media can negatively impact a romantic relationship. When employed with care and awareness, these tools can help maintain and strengthen loving partnerships.

A final thought about romantic relationships: They are a means for meeting intimacy needs, but not the *only* means. It's quite possible to

have close, affectionate relationships without having a romantic partner. Social scientist Bella DePaulo (2006) is an outspoken advocate of singleness. She observes that although American society affords many social and economic benefits to couples, the amount of people identifying as single has more than doubled in recent decades. "Increasing numbers of people are single because they want to be," says DePaulo (2016). "Living single allows them to live their best, most authentic, and most meaningful life."

One study suggests that single people may lead richer relational lives. In an analysis of national survey data (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2016), singles were more likely than marrieds to stay in touch with, provide help to, and receive help from parents, siblings, neighbors, and friends. In sum, "being single increases the social connections of both women and men" (p. 361). To return to a theme from this chapter's introduction, it's vital to have close relationships—perhaps as many as five in your innermost circle. But if one of those five isn't a romantic partner, that's not necessarily a problem. In fact, it might free you up to communicate more with your closest friends and family.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Objective 10.1 Identify the different types of friendship and the role communication plays in maintaining them.

Several factors determine friendship types, such as length of the relationship; task/maintenance orientation; and degrees of disclosure, obligation, and contact. Sex and gender affect the way friends communicate with each other. Successful friendships follow a number of guidelines that help avoid expectancy violations.

Q: Use the characteristics on pages 292–293 to describe the nature of communication in two of your friendships—one same sex and one cross sex. How satisfied are you with the quality of communication in each of these friendships? Could you make any changes to improve your satisfaction level?

Objective 10.2 Describe how communication creates and sustains relationships within families.

Contemporary families have a variety of traditional and nontraditional arrangements. These arrangements are formed through the communication of narratives, rituals, and rules. Over time, families develop into systems, as members interact with one another to form a whole.

Effective communication in families requires that members establish and maintain a moderate level of cohesion, and they do this by establishing appropriate boundaries. In addition, functional families are adaptable, managing change without too much rigidity or acquiescence. Members of healthy families encourage each other with confirming messages and strive for win-win solutions to their conflicts.

Q: What narratives, rituals, and rules shape communication in your family? What communication patterns characterize your family system? Would any changes in communication patterns and practices lead to a more cohesive, healthy system?

Objective 10.3 Describe the ways in which love is expressed in romantic relationships.

Most romantic relationships are typified by three components: love, commitment, and affection. Partners who want to improve their communication can learn each other's love languages and use social media in ways that enhance their relationship.

Q: In a romantic relationship you know well, describe the communication of love, commitment, and affection. Which love languages are most resonant for each person, and how well does each partner communicate in those languages? How does communication—both face-to-face and mediated—shape the quality of the relationship?

KEY TERMS

Boundaries (309)
Conformity orientation (305)
Conversation orientation (305)
Expectancy violation (299)
Family (301)
Family communication patterns (305)
Friendship (292)
Love languages (316)
Relational commitment (313)
System (304)
Triangular theory of love (312)

ACTIVITIES

1. With a group of classmates, analyze how gender affects communication in same-sex and cross-sex friendships. Each group member should give examples of communication in two friendships: one same sex and one cross sex. For each relationship, record both the subject of the interaction (e.g., school, finances) and the nature of the interaction (e.g., emotional expression, personal information, shared activities). Compare your findings and identify the patterns that emerge.

2. Identify the ongoing narratives in either your current family or your family of origin. Explain:

a. The narrative
b. When and how it is retold
c. The way this narrative portrays your family
d. The function the narrative serves

Compare narratives with your classmates. What themes emerge? What do your findings say about the power of narratives to shape family relationships?

3. In your romantic relationships, which of the components of love—intimacy, passion, or commitment—is most important to you, and why? Which is least important? Discuss your rankings with a group of classmates and note any patterns that emerge.

4. With a group of classmates, describe a romantic relationship that embodies the best practices outlined in this chapter. Also describe relationships that suffer due to the lack of each of these best practices. What lessons can you learn from this exercise to make communication in your own romantic relationship more rewarding?

SCORING FOR ASSESSING YOUR COMMUNICATION (PAGE 307)

Add your responses to items 1 through 6. This is your perception of your family's *conversation* orientation: _____. The score can range from 6 to 30; using 18 as the midpoint, scores of 18 and above are high, and 17 and below are low.

Add your responses to items 7 through 12. This is your perception of your family's *conformity* orientation: _____. The score can range from 6 to 30; using 18 as the midpoint, scores of 18 and above are high, and 17 and below are low.

Low conversation orientation + low conformity orientation = family is classified as laissez-faire.

Low conversation orientation + high conformity orientation = family is classified as protective.

High conversation orientation + low conformity orientation = family is classified as pluralistic.

High conversation orientation + high conformity orientation = family is classified as consensual.

11

Managing Conflict

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

11.1 Describe the nature of conflict and its attributes.

11.2 Explain five styles of handling conflict and how they are communicated.

11.3 Recognize various communication patterns in relational conflicts.

11.4 Describe how gender and culture affect communication during conflict.

11.5 Explain how the conflict management process can ideally resolve interpersonal conflicts.

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Once upon a time, there was a world without conflicts. The leaders of each nation recognized the need for cooperation and met regularly to solve any potential problems. They never disagreed on matters needing attention or on ways to handle these matters, and so there were never any international tensions, and of course there was no war.

Within each nation things ran just as smoothly. The citizens always agreed on who their leaders should be, so elections were always unanimous. There was no social friction among various groups. Age, race, and educational differences did exist, but each group respected the others, and all got along harmoniously.

Human relationships were always perfect. Strangers were always kind and friendly to each other. Neighbors were considerate of each other's needs. Friendships were always mutual, and no disagreements ever spoiled people's enjoyment of one another. Once people fell in love—and everyone did—they stayed happy. Partners liked everything about each other and were able to fully satisfy each other's needs. Children and parents agreed on every aspect of family life and never were critical or hostile toward each other. Each day was better than the one before.

Of course, everybody lived happily ever after.

THIS STORY IS OBVIOUSLY a fairy tale. Regardless of what we may wish for or dream about, a conflict-free world just doesn't exist. Even the best communicators, the luckiest people, are bound to wind up in situations where their needs don't match the needs of others. Money, time, power, sex, humor, aesthetic taste, and a thousand other issues arise and keep us from living in a state of perpetual agreement.

For many people, the inevitability of conflict is a depressing fact. They think that the existence of ongoing conflict means that there's little chance for happy relationships with others. Effective communicators know differently. They realize that although it's impossible to *eliminate* conflict, there are ways to *manage* it effectively. The skillful management of conflict can open the door to healthier, stronger, and more satisfying relationships, as well as to increased mental and physical health (Canary, 2003; Laursen & Pursell, 2009).

WHAT IS CONFLICT?

Stop reading for a moment and make a list of conflicts you've experienced personally. The list will probably show you that conflict takes many forms. Sometimes there's angry shouting, as when parents yell at their children, or vice versa. In other cases, conflicts involve restrained discussion, as in labor–management negotiations or court trials. Sometimes conflicts are expressed through hostile silence, as in the unspoken feuds of angry couples. Finally, conflicts may wind up in physical fighting between friends, enemies, or even total strangers.

Whatever forms they may take, all interpersonal conflicts share certain features. William Wilmot and Joyce Hocker (2014) define **conflict** as

an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from the other party in achieving their goals. The various parts of this definition can help you gain a better understanding of how conflict operates in everyday life.

Whether it's an outright struggle or a simmering disagreement, conflict is a part of every relationship. ***What conflicts are most important in your life? How successful are you in managing them?***

EXPRESSED STRUGGLE

The definition of conflict requires that all the people involved know that some disagreement exists. You may be upset for months because a neighbor's loud music keeps you awake at night, but no conflict exists until the neighbor learns about your problem. An expressed struggle doesn't have to be verbal. A dirty look, the silent treatment, and avoiding the other person are all ways of expressing yourself. One way or another, both people must know that a problem exists before it fits our definition of conflict.

INTERDEPENDENCE

However antagonistic they might feel, the people in a conflict are connected. The welfare and satisfaction of one depends on the actions of the other(s) (Johnson & Cionea, 2017).

Many conflicts remain unresolved because the people involved fail to understand, accept, and acknowledge their interdependence. You might find a roommate, neighbor, or coworker annoying. But unless you can sever your ties, you need to work out a way to coexist. One of the first steps toward resolving a conflict is to take the attitude that "we're in this together."

PERCEIVED INCOMPATIBLE GOALS

All conflicts look as if one person's gain would be another's loss. For instance, consider a neighbor whose music keeps you awake at night. It appears that someone has to lose: Either the neighbor loses the enjoyment of hearing the music at full volume, or else you are still awake and unhappy.

The goals in this situation really aren't completely incompatible—solutions do exist that allow you both to get what you want. For instance, you could achieve peace and quiet by closing your windows or getting the neighbor to close hers. You might use earplugs, or perhaps the neighbor could use earphones. If any of these solutions prove workable, then the conflict disappears.

Unfortunately, people often fail to see mutually satisfying answers to their problems. As long as they *perceive* their goals to be mutually exclusive, the conflict is real, albeit unnecessary.

FOCUS ON RESEARCH

The Dangers of Mind-Reading Expectations

Some communicators approach conflicts with mind-reading expectations, assuming their partners will know why they're upset, even if they haven't explained themselves.

Courtney Wright and Michael Roloff wanted to learn the effects of mind-reading expectations on college students in dating relationships. The researchers used a survey that included items such as "People who love each other know each other's thoughts without a word being said." The participants also responded to questions about emotional reactions, conflict styles, and relational satisfaction.

Not surprisingly, subjects with mind-reading expectations were more likely to become upset with their partners than were those without such expectations. The angrier they became, the more likely they were to use the silent treatment to punish their partners. Their assumption seemed to be "You should know why I'm upset—and if you don't, I'm not going to tell you." The researchers noted that mind-reading expectations and the silent treatment typically led to "problematic relational dynamics."

Talking out problems won't always resolve conflicts. But in general, it's better to constructively explain why you're upset than to assume others can read your mind.

Wright, C. N., & Roloff, M. E. (2015). You should *just know* why I'm upset: Expectancy violation theory and the influence of mind reading expectations (MRE) on responses to relational problems. *Communication Research Reports, 32,* 10–19.

PERCEIVED SCARCE RESOURCES

Conflicts also exist when people believe there isn't enough of something to go around: affection, money, space, and so on. Time is often a scarce commodity. Many people struggle to meet the competing demands of school, work, family, and friends. "If there were only more hours in a day" is a common refrain, and making time for the people in your life—and for yourself—is a constant source of conflict.

INEVITABILITY

Conflicts are bound to happen, even in the best relationships. Common sources of conflict among college roommates include access to each other's personal items and food, how clean/messy the rooms are, who can use what furniture, and how involved they should be in each other's personal lives (Ocana & Hindman, 2004). Conflicts with friends also are typical, with an average of one or two disagreements a day (Burk et al., 2009). Among families, conflict can be even more frequent, whether the topic is money, being on time, who does what chores, how to handle relatives, or how to balance work and family obligations (Huffman et al., 2013).

Because it is impossible to avoid conflicts, the challenge is to handle them effectively when they do arise. Decades of research show that people in both happy and unhappy relationships have conflicts, but that they perceive them and manage them in very different ways (Simon et al., 2008; Wilmot & Hocker, 2014). Unhappy couples argue in ways we catalog as

destructive. They are more concerned with defending themselves than with solving problems. They have little or no empathy for each other, use evaluative "you" language, ignore each other's relational messages, and fail to listen carefully. These destructive conflict patterns can result in poor mental and physical health for the parties involved (Segrin & Flora, 2017).

Many satisfied couples handle their conflicts more effectively. They recognize disagreements as healthy and know that conflicts need to be faced (Ridley et al., 2001; Segrin et al., 2009). Although they may argue vigorously, they use skills such as perception checking to find out what the other person is thinking. They let the other person know they understand the other side of the dispute. These people are willing to admit their mistakes, a habit that contributes to a harmonious relationship and also helps solve the problem at hand. With this in mind, we take a closer look at what makes some conflicts more constructive than others.

Media Clip

Fighting over Scarce Resources: *Empire*

Hip-hop mogul Lucious Lyon (Terrance Howard) must choose one of his three sons to take over Empire Entertainment, the company he founded while an ascendant rapper. His ex-wife, Cookie (Taraji P. Henson), demands a controlling role in the business, which she helped found at great personal cost. With so many family members vying for power, conflicts are inevitable.

Critics have described the series as a primetime soap opera, driven by power-seeking characters with outsize egos and self-serving goals. Rather than collaborating toward a shared goal, the key players compete in ways that produce losers and winners, while creating relational and emotional costs for everyone. Although the financial stakes may be higher than usual, the principle is familiar: When resources are perceived to be scarce, the potential for conflict is great.

CONFLICT STYLES

Most people have default styles of handling conflict—characteristic approaches they take when their needs appear incompatible with what others want. Although our habitual styles work in some situations, they may not work at all in others. What styles do you typically use to deal with conflict? Find out by considering this hypothetical situation.

Cam and Lee have been roommates for several years. Cam is a soccer fan and loves watching games with his friends at every opportunity. Their apartment has a big-screen TV (owned by Cam) in the living room, and it has become a regular gathering spot for viewing. Lee doesn't mind watching an occasional game, but he's annoyed by what seems like endless TV (and endless houseguests). Cam thinks he ought to be able to watch his TV whenever he wants, with whomever he wants. Here are five ways they could handle their conflict, representing five different conflict styles:

- *Avoidance.* Cam and Lee don't discuss the issue again—the prospect of fighting is too unpleasant. Cam has tried to cut back on watching

games with friends but feels cheated. Lee keeps quiet, but when game time rolls around, his feelings of displeasure are obvious.

- *Accommodation*. Lee gives in, saying, "Go ahead and watch all the soccer you want. After all, it's your TV. I'll just go in the bedroom and listen to music." Alternatively, Cam could accommodate by agreeing not to watch soccer at home.
- *Competition*. Cam tries to persuade Lee that watching more soccer will lead to a better understanding of the game, and that Lee will want to watch it more as a result. Lee tries to convince Cam that spending so much time watching TV isn't healthy. Both try to get the other person to give up and give in.
- *Compromise*. The roommates agree to split the difference. Cam gets to watch any and every game at home as long as the friends don't come over. Cam gets soccer; Lee gets relative peace and quiet. Of course, Cam misses his friends, and Lee must still endure hours of Cam's TV viewing.
- *Collaboration*. Cam and Lee brainstorm and discover other alternatives. For example, they decide that the fans could watch some games together at a sports bar. They also realize that if each of Cam's friends could pitch in a modest sum, one of the friends could buy a large-screen TV where they could watch some games (and avoid the sports bar costs). Lee also suggests that he and Cam could watch some non-sports TV together.

These approaches represent the five styles depicted in Figure 11.1, each of which is described in the following paragraphs.

AVOIDANCE (LOSE-LOSE)

Avoidance occurs when people choose not to confront an issue directly. It can be physical (steering clear of a friend after having an argument) or conversational (changing the topic, joking, or denying that a problem exists).

FIGURE 11.1 Conflict Styles

Avoidance generally reflects a pessimistic attitude about conflict. Avoiders usually believe it's easier to put up with the status quo than to face the problem head-on and try to solve it. In the case of Cam and Lee, avoidance means that rather than having another fight, both of them will suffer in silence. Their case illustrates how avoidance often produces lose-lose results.

Although avoiding important issues can keep the peace temporarily, it typically leads to unsatisfying relationships (Afifi et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2012). Partners of "self-silencers" report more frustration and discomfort when dealing with the avoiding partner than with those who face conflict more constructively (Harper & Welsh, 2007). And when avoiders don't voice their complaints, their partners' irritating behaviors may increase, which in turn increases their emotional distress (Liu & Roloff, 2016). Chronic misunderstandings, resentments, and

disappointments pile up and contaminate the emotional climate. For this reason, we can say that avoiders have a low concern both for their own needs and for the interests of the other person, who is also likely to suffer from unaddressed issues (see Figure 11.1).

Despite its obvious shortcomings, avoidance isn't always a bad idea (Caughlin & Arr, 2004; Oduro-Frimpong, 2007). You might choose to avoid certain topics or situations if the risk of speaking up is too great, such as getting fired from a job you can't afford to lose, being humiliated in public, or even suffering physical harm. You might also avoid a conflict if the relationship it involves isn't worth the effort. Even in close relationships, though, avoidance has its logic. If the issue is temporary or minor, you might let it pass. These reasons help explain why the communication of many happily married couples is characterized by "selectively ignoring" the other person's minor flaws (Segrin et al., 2009). This doesn't mean that a key to successful relationships is avoiding *all* conflicts. Instead, it suggests that it's smart to save energy for the truly important ones.

ACCOMMODATION (LOSE-WIN)

Accommodation occurs when we entirely give in to others rather than asserting our own point of view. Figure 11.1 depicts accommodators as having low concern for themselves and high concern for others, resulting in lose-win, "we'll do it your way," outcomes.

The motivation of an accommodator plays a significant role in this style's effectiveness. If accommodation is a genuine act of kindness, generosity, or love, then chances are good that it will enhance the relationship. Most people appreciate those who "take one for the team," "treat others as they want to be treated," or "lose the battle to win the war." However, people are far less appreciative of those who habitually use this style to play the role of "martyr, bitter complainer, whiner, or saboteur" (Wilmot & Hocker, 2014).

We should pause here to mention the important role that culture plays in perceptions of conflict styles. People from high-context, collectivistic backgrounds (such as many Asian cultures) are likely to regard avoidance and accommodation as face-saving and noble ways to handle conflict (Ohbuchi &

DARK SIDE OF COMMUNICATION

Ghosting: The Ultimate Silent Treatment

No text responses. No email replies. No phone calls returned. Blocked on social media. You thought you were close to this person, but communication has been suddenly severed. You've been ghosted.

Ghosting involves ending a relationship by cutting off all contact and ignoring the former partner's attempts to reach out (Safronova, 2015). Although it typically occurs in romantic relationships, ghosting happens in friendships, too (Vilhauer, 2015). One poll found that 11 percent of Americans have been ghosted by a partner; another suggests it's twice that amount or more (Borgueta, 2015).

In terms of conflict styles, ghosting can be an act of passive aggression or simple avoidance. Either way, being summarily rejected can leave scars. Here's how one jilted lover described the wake of being ghosted (Wesley, 2016):

> When you leave without saying a word and without giving us a reason, all we have are more questions. We question ourselves, we question who you really were, and we question our futures. Without being given proper closure, we become more afraid of the next romantic encounter.

It's not always wrong to ghost someone. For example, if you're walking out on an abusive relationship, there's good reason to leave without a trace (Bonos, 2015). However, when you're ending a nonthreatening romance or friendship, it's usually best to say goodbye—or at least say something. In most cases, your relational partner deserves that respect.

"It's not enough that we succeed. Cats must also fail."

Atsumi, 2010). In low-context, individualistic cultures (such as that of the United States), avoidance and accommodation are often viewed less positively. For instance, think of the many unflattering terms that Americans use for people who give up or give in during conflicts ("pushover," "weakling," "doormat," "spineless"). As you will read later in this chapter, collectivistic cultures view these behaviors more favorably. The point here is that all conflict styles have merit in certain situations, and that culture plays a significant role in determining how each style is valued.

COMPETITION (WIN-LOSE)

The flip side of accommodation is **competition**, a win-lose approach to conflict that involves high concern for self and low concern for others. As Figure 11.1 shows, competition seeks to resolve conflicts "my way."

Many Americans default to a competitive approach because it's ingrained in their culture, as one author observes:

> Whether we like it or not, we live in a competitive society. Our economy is competitive by design, and as a nation, we see in competition a challenge to develop our resources and ourselves. (Tracy, 1991, p. 4)

Just as competition can develop an economy, it can sometimes develop a relationship. One study found that some people in dating relationships used competition to enrich their interaction (Messman & Mikesell, 2000). For example, some found satisfaction by competing in play (who's the better racquetball or Scrabble player?), in achievement (who gets the better job offer or the higher grade?), and in altruism (who's more romantic or does the most charity work?). These satisfied couples developed a shared narrative (see Chapter 4) that defined competition as a measure of regard, quite different from conflict that signaled a lack of appreciation and respect. Of course, these arrangements could backfire if one partner became a gloating winner or a sore loser. In addition, feeling like you've been defeated can leave you wanting to get even, creating a downward competitive spiral that degrades to a lose-lose outcome (Olson & Braithwaite, 2004).

If you believe your way is the best one, you may feel justified in trying to control the situation, but it's likely that the other person won't view your bid for control so charitably (Gross et al., 2004). The dark side of competition is that it often breeds aggression (Warren et al., 2005). Sometimes aggression is obvious, but at other times it can be subtler. To understand how, read on.

Passive Aggression

Passive aggression occurs when a communicator expresses dissatisfaction in a disguised manner (Brandt, 2013). In our hypothetical conflict between Lee and Cam (p. 327), perhaps Lee runs the vacuum cleaner

loudly during the soccer matches—or Cam makes sarcastic jokes about Lee not liking sports. Passive aggression can take the form of "crazymaking" (Bach & Wyden, 1983)—tactics designed to punish another person without direct confrontation. Crazymaking takes its name from the effect such behavior usually has on its target.

There are a number of crazymaking ways to deal with conflict. One is through guilt: "Never mind. I'll do all the work myself [sigh]. Go ahead and have a good time. Don't worry about me [sigh]." Another crazymaker is when someone agrees with you to your face but has a different agenda behind your back—such as the teenager who says he'll clean his room and then doesn't do so as a means of getting back at the parent who grounded him. Some passive aggression is nonverbal: a roll of the eyes, a pained expression, or a disdainful laugh can get a message across. If the target of these messages asks about them, the passive aggressor can always deny the conflict exists. Even humor—especially sarcasm ("Gee, I can't *wait* to spend the weekend with your folks")—can be used as passive aggression (Bowes & Katz, 2011). And sometimes saying nothing is a crazymaker weapon. No one likes getting "the silent treatment," and it usually damages interpersonal relationships (Wright & Roloff, 2009).

Watch and Discuss

Look up and watch BuzzFeed-Violet's video "Signs You're the Passive Aggressive Friend."

1) What verbal and nonverbal forms of passive aggression can you spot?
2) Which people in your life (including yourself) regularly use passive aggression in conflict situations? What are some examples?

Direct Aggression

Communicators who engage in **direct aggression** attack the position and dignity of the receiver. Communication scholars list a variety of behaviors that can typify direct aggression: attacks on competence or character, swearing, teasing, ridicule, nonverbal emblems (e.g., "the finger"), and threats (Rancer & Avtgis, 2014). In the case of Lee and Cam, the conflict might turn into an ugly shouting match, with denigrating comments about how only an "idiot" would or wouldn't like sports, watching TV, or having friends over.

Chapter 12 (page 360) has more to say about the traits and consequences of aggressive communication. For now, it's worth pointing out that a win-lose conflict style can have a high relational cost—especially when the loser is a close friend or loved one. Your victory might be a hollow one if the other party is glum, hurt, or angry about the conflict's outcome.

COMPROMISE

A **compromise** gives both people at least some of what they want, although both sacrifice part of their goals. People usually settle for a compromise when it seems that partial satisfaction is the best they can hope for.

Although a compromise may be better than losing everything, this approach hardly seems to deserve the positive image it often has. One observer (Filley, 1975) makes an interesting observation about attitudes toward this method. Why is it, he asks, that if someone says, "I will compromise my values," we view the action unfavorably, yet we talk admiringly about people in a conflict who compromise to reach a solution? Although compromise may be the best obtainable result in some conflicts, partners in a dispute can often work together to find much better solutions (Jandt, 2017).

Most of us are surrounded by the results of bad compromises. Consider a common example: the conflict between one person's desire to

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smoke cigarettes and another's need for clean air. The win-lose outcomes on this issue are obvious: Either the smoker abstains or the nonsmoker gets polluted lungs—neither option a very satisfying one. But a compromise in which the smoker gets to enjoy only a rare cigarette or must retreat outdoors and in which the nonsmoker still must inhale some fumes or feel unaccommodating is hardly better. Both sides have lost a considerable amount of both comfort and goodwill. Of course, the costs involved in other compromises are even greater. For example, if a divorced couple's custody battle leaves them bitter and emotionally scars their children, it's hard to say that anybody has won no matter what the outcome.

Some compromises do leave everyone satisfied. You and the seller of a used car might settle on a price that is between what the seller was asking and what you wanted to pay. Although neither of you got everything you wanted, the outcome would still leave both of you satisfied. Likewise, you and your companion might agree to see a movie that is the second choice for both of you. As long as everyone is at least somewhat satisfied with an outcome, compromise can be an effective way to resolve conflicts. When compromises are satisfying and successful, it might be more accurate to categorize them as the final style we discuss: collaboration.

COLLABORATION (WIN-WIN)

Collaboration seeks win-win solutions to conflict. It involves a high degree of concern for both self and others, with the goal of solving problems not "my way" or "your way" but "our way." In the best case, collaborating can lead to a *win-win* outcome, where each person gets what she or he wants (Bannink, 2010).

In **win-win problem solving**, the goal is to find a solution that satisfies the needs of everyone involved. Not only do the partners avoid trying to succeed at each other's expense, but there's also a belief that working together can provide a solution in which all reach their goals without needing to compromise.

Collaborating has benefits beyond the problem at hand. When people want to achieve a win-win resolution to an argument, they're

more likely to actively listen to their partners. That approach leads to less aggressive communication and ultimately less stress for everyone (Liu & Roloff, 2015).

A few examples show how collaboration can lead to win-win outcomes:

- A boss and her employees get into a conflict over scheduling. The employees often want to shift their scheduled work hours to accommodate personal needs, whereas the boss needs to ensure full staffing at all times. After some discussion they arrive at a solution that satisfies everyone: Employees are free to trade hours among themselves, as long as the store remains fully staffed.
- A conflict about testing arises in a college class. Due to sickness and other reasons, some students need to take a make-up exam. The instructor doesn't want to give these students any advantage over their peers or create a new exam. After working on the problem together, the instructor and students arrive at a win-win solution. The instructor will hand out a list of 20 possible exam questions in advance. At examination time, 5 of these questions will be randomly drawn for the class to answer. Students who take a make-up exam will draw from the same pool of questions.
- A newly married couple find themselves arguing frequently over their budget. One partner enjoys buying impractical items, while the other fears that such purchases will ruin their carefully constructed budget. Their solution is to set aside a small amount of money each month for "fun" purchases. The amount is small enough to be affordable while allowing for occasional splurges. The more conservative spouse is satisfied with the arrangement because the fun money is now a budget category.

Although such solutions might seem obvious when you read them here, a moment's reflection will show you that such cooperative problem solving is all too rare. People faced with these types of conflicts often resort to avoiding, accommodating, or competing, and they wind up handling the issues in a manner that results in either a win-lose or lose-lose outcome. As we pointed out earlier, it's a shame to see one or both partners in a conflict come away unsatisfied when they could both get what they're seeking by collaborating. Later in this chapter, you'll learn a specific process for arriving at collaborative solutions to problems.

Of course, a win-win approach is not always possible or even always appropriate. Collaborative problem solving can be quite time consuming, and some conflict decisions need to be made quickly. Moreover, many conflicts are about relatively minor issues that don't call for a great deal of creativity and brainstorming. As you'll see in the following section, there certainly will be times when compromising is the most sensible approach. You will even encounter instances when pushing for your own solution is reasonable. Even more surprisingly, you will probably discover there are times when it makes sense to willingly accept the loser's role. Much of the time, however, good intentions and creative thinking can lead to outcomes that satisfy everyone's needs.

WHICH STYLE TO USE?

Although collaborative problem solving might seem like the most attractive style, it's an oversimplification to imagine that there is a single best way to respond to conflicts (Gross & Guerrero, 2000). Generally speaking, win-win approaches are preferable to win-lose and lose-lose solutions. But we've already seen that there are times when avoidance, accommodation, competition, and compromise are appropriate. Table 11.1 suggests situations when it may be best to use a particular style.

A conflict style isn't necessarily a personality trait that carries across all situations. Wilmot and Hocker (2014) suggest that roughly 50 percent of the population change their style from one situation to another. As you learned in Chapter 1, this sort of behavioral flexibility is a characteristic of competent communicators. Several factors govern which style to use, including the situation, the other person, and your goals.

TABLE 11.1 When to Use Each Conflict Style

Factor	Avoidance (Lose-Lose)	Accommodation (Lose-Win)	Competition (Win-Lose)	Compromise	Collaboration (Win-Win)
The issue's importance	When the issue is of little importance	When the issue is more important to the other person than to you	When the issue is not important enough to negotiate at length	When the issue is moderately important but not enough for a stalemate	When the issue is too important for a compromise
Point of view	To cool down and gain perspective	When you discover you are wrong	When you are convinced that your position is right and necessary	When both sides are strongly committed to mutually exclusive goals	When you can merge insights with someone who has a different perspective on the problem
Time	When the issue isn't worth a lot of time and effort	When the long-term cost of winning may not be worth the short-term gain	When there is not enough time to seek a win-win outcome	To achieve quick, temporary solutions to complex problems	When you are willing to invest the necessary time and energy
Relational considerations	When the costs of confrontation outweigh the benefits	To build up credits for later conflicts	When the other person is not willing to seek a win-win outcome	When you jeopardize nothing important on either side	When the long-term relationship is important
Rationale	To stay away from either unnecessary risk and/or unnecessary involvement	When the issue isn't important or the costs of challenging the other are too high	To protect yourself against an unacceptable threat	As a backup mode when collaboration doesn't work	To come up with creative solutions

Adapted from Wilmot, W. W., & Hocker, J. L. (2014). *Interpersonal conflict* (9th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

ASSESSING YOUR COMMUNICATION

Your Method of Conflict Resolution

Think of a close relationship with someone you see regularly (e.g., a parent, sibling, roommate, close friend, spouse, or partner). How do you usually respond to conflicts with this person? Indicate the degree to which you believe each of the following statements applies to you during these conflicts, using a scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 = "never" and 5 = "very often."

_____ **1.** I am usually firm in pursuing my goals.

_____ **2.** I attempt to deal with all of the other person's and my own concerns.

_____ **3.** I try to find a compromise solution.

_____ **4.** I try to avoid creating unpleasantness for myself.

_____ **5.** It's important to me that others are happy, even if it comes at my expense.

_____ **6.** I try to win my position.

_____ **7.** I consistently seek the other's help in working out a solution.

_____ **8.** I give up some points in exchange for others.

_____ **9.** I try to postpone dealing with the issue.

_____ **10.** I might try to soothe the other's feelings and preserve our relationship.

_____ **11.** I persistently try to get my points made.

_____ **12.** I try to integrate my concerns with the other person's.

_____ **13.** I will let the other person have some of what she or he wants if she or he lets me have some of what I want.

_____ **14.** I sometimes avoid taking positions that would create controversy.

_____ **15.** I sometimes sacrifice my own wishes for those of the other person.

_____ **16.** I try to show the other person the logic and benefits of my position.

_____ **17.** I tell the other person my ideas and ask for his or hers.

_____ **18.** I propose a middle ground.

_____ **19.** I try to do what is necessary to avoid tensions.

_____ **20.** I don't worry about my own concerns if satisfying them means damaging the relationship.

Adapted from the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument: Thomas, K. W., & Kilmann, R. H. (2007). *Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument.* Mountain View, CA: Xicom, a subsidiary of CPP, Inc. (Original work published 1974). Also see Thomas, K. W., & Kilmann, R. (1978). Comparison of four instruments measuring conflict behavior. *Psychological Report, 42,* 1139–1145.

For scoring information, see page 351 at the end of the chapter.

The Situation

When someone clearly has more power than you, accommodation may be the best approach. If the boss tells you to "fill that order *now!*" you probably ought to do it without comment. A more competitive response ("Why don't you ask Karen to do it? She has less work than I do") might state your true feelings, but it could also cost you your job. Beyond power, other situational factors can shape your communication in a conflict. For example, you would probably try to set aside personal disagreements with siblings or parents when it's necessary to support one another during a family crisis.

The Other Person

Although win-win is a fine ideal, sometimes the other person isn't interested in (or good at) collaborating. You probably know communicators who are so competitive that even for minor issues, they put winning ahead of the well-being of your relationship. In such cases, your efforts to collaborate may have a low chance of success.

Your Goals

When you want to solve a problem, it's generally good to be assertive (see Chapter 5 for information on creating assertive "I" messages). But there are other reasons for communicating in a conflict. Sometimes your overriding concern is to calm down an enraged or upset communicator. For example, company policy or self-preservation might lead you to keep quiet in the face of a customer's rant or a boss's unfair criticism. Likewise, you might choose to sit quietly through the nagging of a family member at Thanksgiving dinner rather than make a scene. In other cases, your moral principles might compel an aggressive statement, even though it might not get you what you originally sought: "I've had enough of your racist jokes. I've tried to explain why they're so offensive, but I don't think you have listened. I'm leaving!"

CONFLICT IN RELATIONAL SYSTEMS

Even though the style you choose in a conflict is important, your approach isn't the only factor that will determine how the situation unfolds. In reality, conflict happens within *relational systems*; its character is usually determined by the way the people involved interact (Williams-Baucom et al., 2010). For example, you might expect to handle a conflict with your neighbors collaboratively, only to be driven to competition by their uncooperative nature or even to avoidance by their physical threats. Likewise, you might plan to avoid talking with a professor about your discomfort with the class format but wind up collaboratively discussing the matter in response to her constructive suggestion. Examples like these demonstrate that conflict isn't just a matter of individual choice. Rather, it depends on relational interactions.

COMPLEMENTARY AND SYMMETRICAL CONFLICT

The conflict approaches of partners in interpersonal relationships—and impersonal ones, too—can be complementary or symmetrical. In **complementary conflict**, the partners use different but mutually reinforcing

behaviors. As Table 11.2 illustrates, some complementary conflicts are destructive, whereas others are constructive. In **symmetrical conflict**, both people use the same tactics. Table 11.2 shows how the same conflict can unfold in very different ways, depending on whether the partners' communication is symmetrical or complementary.

A complementary "fight–flight" approach is common in many unhappy marriages. One partner addresses the conflict directly, whereas the other withdraws (Caughlin & Vangelisti, 2006). As Chapter 4 explained, this pattern can lead to a cycle of increasing hostility and isolation because each partner punctuates the conflict differently, blaming the other for making matters worse. "I withdraw because you're so critical," one partner might say. However, the other wouldn't sequence it the same way: "I criticize because you withdraw." Couples who use demand–withdraw patterns report being less than satisfied with their conflict discussions and that their negotiations rarely produce change (McGinn et al., 2009).

The same fight–flight pattern also shows up in conflicts between parents and teenagers, most commonly when they tangle over issues like chores, cleanliness, and curfews. Families who fall into a demand–withdraw pattern are likely to feel stressed and unhappy about their relationships. They even have a greater likelihood of falling ill than families who handle disagreements more constructively (Reznik et al., 2015).

Complementary approaches aren't the only ones that can lead to problems. Some distressed relationships suffer from destructively symmetrical communication (Weingart et al., 2015). If both partners treat each other with matching hostility, one threat and insult leads to another in an **escalatory spiral**. If the partners both withdraw from each other instead of facing their problems, a problematic **de-escalatory spiral** results: the hostility decreases, but the satisfaction and vitality ebb from the relationship.

TABLE 11.2 Complementary and Symmetrical Conflict Outcomes

Situation	Complementary Conflict	Symmetrical Conflict
One partner is upset because the other is spending little time at home.	**Destructive:** One partner makes demands; the other withdraws, spending even less time at home.	**Constructive:** One partner raises concern clearly and assertively, without aggression. The other responds by explaining concerns in the same manner.
Boss makes fun of employee in front of other workers.	**Constructive:** Employee seeks out boss for private conversation, explaining why the joking was embarrassing. Boss listens willingly.	**Destructive:** Employee maliciously jokes about boss at company party. Boss continues to make fun of employee.
Parents are uncomfortable about teenager's new friends.	**Destructive:** Parents express concerns. Teen dismisses them, saying "There's nothing to worry about."	**Constructive:** Teen expresses concern that parents are being too protective. Parents and teen negotiate a mutually agreeable solution.

As portrayed in the Broadway musical *Hamilton*, the long-running feud between Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton turned into a lethal escalatory spiral. ***What tactics can you use to keep an interpersonal conflict from raging out of control?***

As Table 11.2 shows, however, both complementary and symmetrical behaviors can also be constructive. If the complementary behaviors are positive, then a positive spiral results, and the conflict stands a good chance of being resolved. This is the case in the second example in Table 11.2, when the boss is open to hearing the employee's concerns. Here, a complementary talk–listen pattern works well.

Constructive symmetry occurs when both people communicate assertively, listening to one another's concerns and working together to resolve them. Married couples who take this approach appraise their marriages more positively than any other type of couple does (Hanzal & Segrin, 2009; Ridley et al., 2001). The parent–teenager conflict in Table 11.2 has the potential for this sort of solution. With enough mutual respect and careful listening, both the parents and their teenager can understand one another's concerns and possibly find a way to give all three people what they want.

SERIAL ARGUMENTS

In a perfect world, we could work through each relational conflict and move on, satisfied that the matter was resolved. But in real life, some issues keep recurring. Like weeds in a garden, they become a perennial problem that requires constant attention.

Serial arguments are repetitive conflicts about the same issue (Morrison & Schrodt, 2017). They can focus on topics ranging from the seemingly mundane (e.g., managing household chores) to the extremely serious (e.g., substance abuse, infidelity).

One study looked at causes of serial arguments in romantic relationships (Bevan et al., 2014). One of the most common involves *problematic behaviors*—habits such as chronic overspending (or tight budgeting) and sloppiness (or hyper-neatness).

Another source of ongoing friction is *personality characteristics*, such as introversion and extroversion. If you're an extrovert who craves social interaction, and your partner is an introvert who cherishes solitude (or vice versa), challenges are likely. Some serial arguments stem from only one partner's personality: a perpetual pessimist or a constant critic, for example. Changing deeply ingrained ways of thinking and acting isn't impossible, but it's difficult.

Another common issue in serial arguments involves *communication styles and practices*, or the typical ways in which partners communicate. For example, if you typically avoid confrontation while your partner is routinely assertive, that's likely to cause continual friction. Likewise, chronic disputes will probably occur if you prefer candor while your partner is more diplomatic.

Regardless of the topic, unresolved serial arguments can be emotionally loaded. Frustration with recurring problems can lead to the kinds of rumination described in Chapter 8, adding fuel to the emotional fire and making future arguments more intense (Bevan et al., 2017). It's not surprising then that serial arguments are more likely than nonrecurring ones to use hostile communication. Angry exclamations such as "We've been down this road a dozen times!" or "I can't believe we're fighting about this again!" are typical of serial arguing and express a sense of despair.

Despite this discouraging picture, the results can be positive when both partners are equally involved and willing to talk about the chronic issue (Johnson & Cionea, 2017). Positive expectations also can help: Partners who seek a win-win outcome are more likely to listen to each other and less likely to be hostile, ultimately leading to less stress and anger (Liu & Roloff, 2015). The problem-solving method described at the end of this chapter might not make serial arguments go away, but it can offer steps in the right direction. And third-party intervention may help both parties see the recurring problem in a new and helpful light (see the sidebar on p. 346).

TOXIC CONFLICT: THE "FOUR HORSEMEN"

Some conflict approaches are so destructive that they are almost guaranteed to wreak havoc on relationships. These toxic forms of communication include what John Gottman has called the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" (Gottman, 1994; see also Fowler & Dillow, 2011; Horan et al., 2015).

Gottman has gathered decades of data about newlywed couples and their communication patterns. By observing their interactions, he has been able to predict with high accuracy whether the newlyweds will end up divorcing. Here are the four destructive signs he looks for:

1. **Criticism**: These are attacks on a person's character. As you read in Chapter 5, there's a significant difference between legitimate complaints phrased in descriptive "I" language ("I wish you had been on time—we're going to be late to the movie") and critical character assaults stated as evaluative "you" messages ("You're so thoughtless—you never think of anyone but yourself").
2. **Defensiveness**: As you'll read in Chapter 12, defensiveness is a reaction that aims to protect one's presenting self by denying responsibility ("You're crazy—I never do that") and counterattacking ("You're worse about that than I am"). Although some self-protection is understandable, problems arise when a person refuses to listen to or even acknowledge another's concerns.

In "Love Yourself," Justin Bieber sings about two of Gottman's four horsemen. The lyric "I never like to admit I was wrong" reveals defensiveness, and "My mama don't like you, and she likes everyone" reflects contempt. ***How would you react if you were on the receiving end of comments like these?***

3. **Contempt**: A contemptuous comment belittles and demeans. It can take the form of name-calling putdowns ("You're a real jerk") or sarcastic barbs ("Oh, *that* was brilliant"). Contempt can also be communicated nonverbally through dramatic eye rolls or disgusted sighs. (Try doing both of those at the same time and imagine how dismissing they can be.)
4. **Stonewalling**: Stonewalling occurs when one person in a relationship withdraws from the interaction, shutting down dialogue—and any chance of resolving the problem in a mutually satisfactory way. It sends a disconfirming "you don't matter" message to the other person.

Here's a brief exchange illustrating how the "four horsemen" can lead to a destructive spiral of aggression:

"You overdrew our account again—can't you do *anything* right?" (Criticism)
"Hey, don't blame me—you're the one who spends most of the money." (Defensiveness)
"At least I have better math skills than a first-grader. Way to go, Einstein." (Contempt)
"Whatever" (said while walking out of the room). (Stonewalling)

Engaging in this kind of communication not only jeopardizes relationships but also takes a physical toll (Haase et al., 2016). Critical, contemptuous communicators have an increased risk of cardiovascular problems such as high blood pressure and chest pain. Stonewallers tend to experience backaches and stiff muscles. In other words, it's not healthy to either "blow up" or "bottle up." Instead, communicators in conflict need to express their emotions in healthy, productive ways, as outlined in this chapter and the next.

Toxic conflict can be destructive in any interpersonal relationship. Criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling feed off one another and can develop into destructive conflict rituals, as we see next.

CONFLICT RITUALS

When people have been in a relationship for some time, their communication often develops into **conflict rituals**—unacknowledged but very real repeating patterns of interlocking behavior (Wilmot & Hocker, 2014). Consider a few common rituals:

- A young child interrupts her parents, demanding to be included in their conversation. At first the parents tell the child to wait, but she whines and cries until the parents find it easier to listen than to ignore the fussing. This pattern reoccurs whenever the child has a demand the parents hesitate to fulfill.
- A couple fights. One partner leaves. The other accepts blame for the problem and begs forgiveness. The first partner returns, and a happy reunion takes place. Soon they fight again, and the pattern repeats.

- One friend is unhappy with the other. The unhappy person withdraws until the other asks what's wrong. "Nothing," the first replies. The questioning persists until the problem is finally out in the open. The friends then solve the issue and continue happily until the next problem arises, when the pattern repeats itself.

There's nothing inherently wrong with the interaction in many rituals (Olson, 2002). Consider the preceding examples. In the first, the child's whining may be the only way she can get the parents' attention. In the second, both partners might use the fighting as a way to blow off steam, and both might find that the joy of a reunion is worth the grief of the separation. The third ritual might work well when one friend is more assertive than the other.

Rituals can cause problems, though, when they become the *only* way relational partners handle their conflicts. As you learned in Chapter 1, competent communicators have a large repertoire of behaviors, and they are able to choose the most effective response for a given situation. Relying on one pattern to handle all conflicts is no more effective than using a screwdriver to handle every home repair or putting the same seasoning in every dish you cook; what works in one situation isn't likely to succeed in most others. Conflict rituals may be familiar and comfortable, but they aren't the best way to solve the variety of problems that come up in any relationship.

VARIABLES IN CONFLICT STYLES

By now you can see that every relational system is unique. The communication patterns in one family, business, or classroom are likely to be very different from those in any other. But along with the differences that arise in individual relationships, two powerful variables affect the way people manage conflict: gender and culture.

GENDER

Some research suggests that men and women often approach conflicts differently (e.g., Archer, 2002; Gayle et al., 2002). These differences may emerge in adolescence. Whereas teenage boys often engage in verbal showdowns or even physical fights, teenage girls typically use gossip, backbiting, and social exclusion (Hess & Hagen, 2006; Underwood, 2003). This is not to suggest that girls' aggression is any less destructive than boys'. The movie and musical *Mean Girls* (based on Rosalind Wiseman's book *Queen Bees and Wannabes*, 2003) offers a vivid depiction of just how injurious these indirect assaults can be on the self-concepts and relationships of young women. Research suggests that these forms of female aggression continue into college and can occur online as well as in person (Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2013).

A survey of college students reinforced stereotypes about the influence of gender in conflicts (Collier, 1991). Regardless of their cultural

FOCUS ON RESEARCH

"We Have to Talk": Men and Women in Conflict

Imagine you're in a heterosexual dating relationship and get into a quarrel with your partner. One of you wants to drop the subject and move on. The other says, "No, we need to talk this out." Venture a guess: Who is likely the male in this episode, and who is the female?

Tamara Afifi and her colleagues asked 100 dating couples to hold a private conversation about a conflict issue in their relationship. Afterward, the researchers surveyed each partner about his or her relational communication and satisfaction, then did so again a week later.

If you thought the "talk it out" person in the scenario was likely female, you're right. Most women in the study wanted and expected open conversations about conflict. If they sensed their partners were being avoidant, they weren't happy. If they brooded about it for a week, their relational dissatisfaction grew. On the other hand, most men had different expectations for openness during conflict. They also weren't bothered if they thought either partner was avoiding conflict.

These results reflect cultural "standards for openness," according to the researchers. It appears that American women often expect to talk things out during conflicts in ways that men do not. Men may avoid conflict to stay out of harm's way—but in doing so, they might create greater relational problems with the women they date.

Afifi, T. D., Joseph, A., & Aldeis, D. (2012). The "standards for openness hypothesis": Why women find (conflict) avoidance more dissatisfying than men. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 29,* 102–125.

background, female students described men as being concerned with power and more interested in content than in relational issues. Sentences used to describe male conflict styles included, "The most important thing to males in conflict is their egos"; "Men don't worry about feelings"; and "Men are more direct." In contrast, women were described as being more concerned with maintaining the relationship during a conflict. Sentences used to describe female conflict styles included, "Women are better listeners"; "Women try to solve problems without controlling the other person"; and "Females are more concerned with others' feelings."

In contrast with this extreme view, another body of research suggests that gender differences in handling conflict are rather small (Samter & Cupach, 1998; Woodin, 2011). As Woodin (2011) concluded, "men and women may be more similar than different in resolving conflict" (p. 332). People may *think* that there are greater differences in male

and female ways of handling conflicts than actually exist (Allen, 1998). People who assume that men are aggressive and women accommodating may notice behavior that fits these stereotypes ("See how much he bosses her around? A typical man!"). On the other hand, behavior that doesn't fit these preconceived ideas (accommodating men, pushy women) goes unnoticed.

The research described so far focuses on how gender affects the way *individuals* deal with conflict. Given the transactional nature of communication, it's just as important to explore how gender affects behavior when people in close relationships disagree.

After studying heterosexual marriages for years, John Gottman (of "Four Horsemen" fame) wanted to know if gay and lesbian couples have the same conflict patterns as heterosexual partners. An extensive study (Gottman et al., 2003) revealed that same-sex couples approach conflicts far less negatively than male–female partners. This lack of hostility creates positive communication spirals, in which same-sex partners are able to hear each other's complaints less defensively. Why do same-sex couples manage conflicts more constructively? Gottman speculates that their relationships don't have as many of the power struggles that come from traditional male and female sex roles. When it comes to conflict management, he believes that "heterosexual relationships may have a great deal to learn from homosexual relationships" (p. 87).

Managing household labor illustrates one way same-sex partners may handle conflicts better than heterosexual partners. Handling chores is no small matter; communication researchers have found that arguments about daily tasks are among the most frequent and destructive sources of relational conflict (Alberts et al., 2011). Housekeeping arguments can be especially strong in heterosexual relationships, where gender norms about domestic responsibilities come into play. Research suggests that same-sex parents divvy up child-care responsibilities more evenly, and also participate more equally than heterosexual parents in family interactions (Farr & Patterson, 2013).

Sporting events often reflect cultural values and attitudes in ways that might not immediately be apparent. ***By looking at competitive forms of entertainment, what can you learn about the assumptions that govern conflict in your home culture?***

CULTURE

People from most cultures prefer mutually beneficial resolutions to disagreements whenever possible (Cai & Fink, 2002). Nonetheless, the ways in which people communicate during conflicts vary from one culture to another (Croucher et al., 2012). Cultures differ in their orientation toward disagreement (is it to be avoided or is it acceptable?), rapport management (how important is it to ensure relationship maintenance?),

and the preserving of face (is it vital to preserve dignity for self and the other party?).

Ways of managing conflict that are unremarkable in one culture may look odd to outsiders. As you read in Chapter 2, the direct communication style that characterizes many low-context North American and Western European cultures is not the norm in other parts of the world. Assertiveness that might seem perfectly appropriate to a native of the United States or Canada would be rude and insensitive in many high-context Asian countries (Ma & Jaeger, 2010). Members of individualistic cultures often prefer competing as a conflict style, whereas members of collectivistic cultures prefer the styles of compromising and problem solving (Lim, 2009).

East Asian cultures tend to avoid confrontation, placing a premium on preserving and honoring the face of the other person. The Japanese notion of self-restraint is reflected in the important concept of *wa*, or harmony. This aversion to conflict is even manifested in the Japanese legal system. Estimates are that the Japanese have only one lawyer for every 4,000 people, whereas in the United States, a culture that values assertive behavior, there is one lawyer for every 275 people.

The same attitude toward conflict aversion has traditionally prevailed in China (which has approximately one lawyer for every 6,500 people), where one proverb states, "The first person to raise his voice loses the argument." Among Chinese college students (in both the People's Republic and Taiwan), the three most common methods of persuasion are "hinting," "setting an example by one's own actions," and "strategically agreeing to whatever pleases others" (Ma & Chuang, 2001)—even if the consequences are negative (Zhang et al., 2011). However, these approaches appear to be changing. Young adults in China favor collaborative problem solving more than do their elders (Zhang et al., 2005), and they acknowledge that conflicts can have value for achieving one's own goals and improving relationships (Xie et al., 2015).

Within American culture, race/ethnicity plays a modest but important role in shaping what people think about conflict. One study showed that when Americans described their views on conflict, there were few differences by race/ethnicity (Cionea et al., 2015). However, Caucasians were more likely than Asian Americans and African Americans to say that conflict could have a positive effect on relationships. Asian Americans tended to be more withdrawn in conflict, while Hispanic and Latino Americans were more assertive. But again, these differences were relatively small and were dependent on how strongly the respondents identified with their race or ethnicity.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN PRACTICE

The collaborative conflict management style described earlier in this chapter is a skill to be learned, and it pays off. An 11-year study following 100 couples who had conflict skills training found that *it works* for couples

willing to focus on improving their relationships (Hahlweg & Richter, 2010).

Win-win problem solving can be enacted through a seven-step approach (adapted from Weider-Hatfield, 1981 and Raider et al., 2006). Notice how many of the skills that have been discussed throughout this book are incorporated in this process:

1. **Define your needs.** Begin by deciding what you want or need. Sometimes the answer is obvious, as in our earlier example of the neighbor whose loud music kept others awake. In other instances, however, the apparent problem masks a more fundamental one.

   Because your needs won't always be clear, it's often necessary to think about a problem alone, before approaching the other person involved. Talking to a third person can sometimes help you sort out your thoughts. In either case, you should explore both the apparent content of your dissatisfaction and the relational issues that may lurk behind it.
2. **Share your needs with the other person.** Once you've defined your needs, it's time to share them with your partner. Two guidelines are important here. First, be sure to choose a time and place that is suitable. Unloading on a tired or busy partner lowers the odds that your concerns will be well received. Likewise, be sure you are at your best; don't bring an issue up when your anger may cause you to say things you'll later regret, when your discouragement blows the problem out of proportion, or when you're distracted by other business. Making a date to discuss the problem—such as after dinner or over a cup of coffee—often can boost the odds of a successful outcome.

   The second guideline for sharing a problem is to use the descriptive "I" language outlined in Chapter 5. In a tense situation,

Media Clip

Hostile Takeover: *The Founder*

It started as a collaboration. The McDonald brothers (played by Nick Offerman and John Carroll Lynch) had a successful fast-food restaurant in California. Ray Kroc (Michael Keaton) had the vision and know-how to franchise the concept across the country. It seemed like a win-win partnership.

Even though McDonald's became an iconic brand, *The Founder* isn't a feel-good story. Based on actual events, the film chronicles how Kroc turned competitive, intent on taking all the gold from the arches. He's not an ethical communicator. Kroc leaves the McDonald brothers out of business decisions, hangs up on their phone calls, and fails to keep his word. Ultimately he buys them out of their business and its name—which of course is *their* name.

To be fair, McDonald's wouldn't have become a world-famous chain without Kroc, and the brothers were compensated in the buyout. But Kroc broke more than just promises. In pursuit of material success, he destroyed a partnership. The story reminds us that when relationships matter, winning at the expense of others can have its own costs.

however, it may not be easy to start sharing your needs. Raider et al. (2006) recommend beginning with what they call *ritual sharing*, which is preliminary, casual conversation. The goal is to build rapport, establish common ground, and perhaps pick up information.

3. **Listen to the other person's needs.** Once your own wants and needs are clear, it's time to find out what the other person wants and needs. This phase requires active listening skills (as described in Chapter 7) and empathy (Jandt, 2017). Now is a good time to engage in paraphrasing, both to make sure the other person has been heard and to draw out additional information.

   Recognize that this stage might take some time. Before moving to generating solutions, both people need to believe they have been heard and that all the content and relational issues of their conflict are on the table. This might include exploring how previous issues (or even previous relationships) are affecting how they're communicating with each other about this particular conflict.

@work Third-Party Dispute Resolution

In a perfect world, people involved in disagreements would solve every problem themselves. But in real life, even the best intentions don't always lead to a satisfying conclusion. At times like these, a neutral third party can help—especially in workplace conflicts.

Consider the many types of business disputes where this is true: clashes between partners, contract disagreements, conflicts among team members, employee grievances, and consumer complaints, to name a few. As these examples show, some conflicts occur between members of the same organization, whereas others involve an organization at odds with an outsider.

Third-party interventions can range from informal to legalistic. At the simple end of the spectrum, you and a colleague might ask a trusted coworker to help you resolve a disagreement. In other cases, it may be useful to involve a trained mediator or facilitator who can help sort out issues and suggest

solutions. In the most serious cases, parties may submit their grievances to an arbitrator or judge who will impose a decision. Whichever approach is used, it's important that a third party be neutral and unbiased to ensure a fair and effective outcome (Gent & Shannon, 2011). Whatever the form, third-party intervention can help bring closure to a dispute that would otherwise fester or escalate.

4. **Generate possible solutions.** In the next step, you and your partner try to think of ways to satisfy both your needs. You can best do so by "brainstorming"—inventing as many potential solutions as you can. The key to success in brainstorming is to seek quantity without worrying about quality. Prohibit criticism of any idea, no matter how outlandish it may sound. An idea that seems farfetched can sometimes lead to a more workable one. Another rule of brainstorming is that ideas aren't personal property. If one person makes a suggestion, the other should feel free to suggest another solution that builds on or modifies the original one. The original suggestion and its offshoots are all potential solutions that will be considered later. Once partners get over their possessiveness about ideas, the level of defensiveness drops, and both people can work together to find the best solution without worrying about whose idea it is.
5. **Evaluate the possible solutions, and choose the best one.** The time to evaluate the solutions is after they all have been generated, after you feel you have exhausted all the possibilities. In this step, the possible solutions are reviewed for their ability to satisfy everyone's important goals. How does each solution stand up against the individual and mutual goals? Which solution satisfies the most goals? Partners need to work cooperatively in examining each solution and in finally selecting the best one—or perhaps some combination of ideas.
6. **Implement the solution.** Now the time comes to try out the idea selected to see if it does, indeed, satisfy everyone's needs. Sometimes solutions that seem good in theory don't work well in practice. That's why it's important to engage in the final step of the conflict management process—the follow-up.
7. **Follow up on the solution.** To stop the process after selecting and implementing a particular solution assumes any solution is forever, that people remain constant, and that events never alter circumstances. Of course, this is not the case: As people and circumstances change, a particular solution may lose or increase its effectiveness. Regardless, a follow-up evaluation needs to take place.

   After you've tested your solution for a short time, it's a good idea to plan a meeting to talk about how things are going. You may find that you need to make some changes or even rethink the whole problem. In addition, people can walk away from conflict sessions believing they agree on a resolution, when in fact they don't (Roloff et al., 2015). Following up can help ensure that partners are on the same page.

   Table 11.3 walks through each stage of this process. What works for the couple in this scenario might not work for others, but that's what makes communication unique to each relationship. The key is to be satisfied with your solution.

TABLE 11.3 Walkthrough of the Conflict Management Process

Scenario: Brook and Anant have been seeing each other for several months and are now in an exclusive relationship. Brook calls or texts Anant frequently when they're apart. Anant rarely initiates contact with Brook and usually doesn't respond to messages. Each is annoyed with the other's behavior.

Step	Example
1. Define your needs.	At first, Anant thinks the annoyance is only due to being interrupted while trying to focus on school and work. More self-examination shows that the irritation centers on the relational message Brook's calls seem to imply. Anant views the constant contact as a form of being monitored and perhaps as a sign that Brook doesn't trust what Anant is doing when they aren't together.
2. Share your needs with the other person.	After some preliminary, casual conversation (ritual sharing), Anant could offer this observation: "Brook, our relationship is very important to me, and I'm glad you want to keep in touch. I'm a bit concerned, however, about how often you call or text me. When I'm at school or work, or if I'm hanging out with my friends, I want to be able to focus on those activities. At times like that, your messages can seem like a distraction rather than a sign of affection. And I'll admit that I wonder *why* you're calling so often. Is there some sort of trust issue we need to discuss?"
3. Listen to the other person's needs.	It's possible that Brook will have a defensive reaction to Anant's observation ("I can't believe you see my calls and texts as a *distraction*!"), but ideally the needs and concerns that drive the conversation will become clear. Brook: "When I call and text you, it's my way of communicating that I'm thinking about you. When you don't respond, it hurts. I take it as a sign that you don't care about me as much as I care about you." Anant: "So you're saying that texts and calls are just a sign of care and concern, and they're not an attempt to monitor me?" This might allow Brook to explore the motives for messaging Anant. Brook might paraphrase Anant this way: "It sounds like you don't want to have contact with me when we're away from each other, and that you view my messages as an intrusion into your personal space." Anant can then clarify which parts of that interpretation are or are not accurate.
4. Generate possible solutions.	Anant and Brook use brainstorming to generate solutions for their problem. The list includes eliminating, limiting, continuing, or increasing the number of calls Brook makes to Anant. Likewise, Anant could reduce or increase responses to Brook. The couple could decide that text messages are preferable to voice messages, or that one type of contact (call or text) needs to be answered and the other doesn't. Day calls might be okay but not evening calls, or vice versa. Perhaps Anant could initiate calls; maybe Brook could contact other friends instead when wanting to chat. They might also discuss larger issues about how much time they spend together in person or with their friends. It could even be an opportunity to discuss whether they want to slow down or speed up their relationship. Although some of these solutions are clearly unacceptable to both partners, they list all the ideas they can think of, preparing themselves for the next step in win-win problem solving.
5. Evaluate the possible solutions, and choose the best one.	Brook and Anant decide to limit texts and calls to two or three per day, and that Anant will initiate at least one of them. They also agree to briefly respond to the other's text messages when they're at social events, but not during school or work hours. Anant believes that fewer calls will communicate that Brook values autonomy and trusts their relationship. Brook thinks that messages Anant initiates or responds to will indicate that both are equally invested in the relationship.

6. Implement the solution.	Anant and Brook follow their new guidelines and, for the most part, are satisfied—but there are still some issues. If Brook contacts Anant simply to say, "I'll be home in 30 minutes," does that count? Likewise, if Anant initiates a message, but it's just about making arrangements, does that satisfy Brook?
7. Follow up on the solution.	Brook and Anant schedule a date to talk about their solution two weeks later. Over dinner, they both report feeling good about the new arrangements and realize that trust was indeed an issue for Brook. They agree to differentiate between personal calls (which they will limit) and necessary calls to make arrangements as needed (which will have no constraints). Anant admits that initiating calls is challenging and decides to turn off the phone during school and work hours. Brook asks Anant to send a quick text when open for contact. Anant sees that as a good way to remember to send a check-in message each day.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Objective 11.1 Describe the nature of conflict and its attributes.

Despite wishes and cultural myths to the contrary, conflict is a natural and unavoidable part of any relationship. Because conflict can't be escaped, the challenge is how to deal with it effectively so that it strengthens a relationship rather than weakens it. All conflicts possess the same characteristics: expressed struggle, perceived incompatible goals, perceived scarce resources, interdependence, and inevitability.

Q: Describe how the recurring conflicts in one of your important relationships embody the characteristics described in this section.

Objective 11.2 Explain five styles of handling conflict and how they are communicated.

Communicators can respond to conflicts in a variety of ways: avoidance, accommodation, competition, compromise, or collaboration. Each of these approaches can be justified in certain circumstances.

Q: Which of the five styles reflects your typical approach to conflicts? Which styles best describe those with whom you communicate? How satisfying are the results of using these styles? Would other styles be more effective?

Objective 11.3 Recognize various communication patterns in relational conflicts.

The way a conflict is handled isn't always the choice of a single person because the communicators influence one another. In some relationships, partners engage in complementary conflict, whereas in others, the approach is more symmetrical. Repetitive conflicts about the same issue are known as serial arguments. Some forms of communication during conflict are inherently toxic (the "Four Horsemen"): criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling. In ongoing relationships, partners often develop conflict rituals—repeated patterns of interlocking behavior.

Q: Do your conflicts with relational partners tend to be more complementary or symmetrical? Are they more constructive or destructive? Do you or the other person ever resort to using any of the "Four Horsemen"? If so, what are the effects? What conflict rituals characterize your disputes, and how beneficial are these rituals?

Objective 11.4 Describe how gender and culture affect communication during conflict.

Research shows that there are differences in how men and women typically approach conflict. Nonetheless, the individual style of each communicator is more important than biological sex in shaping the way he or she handles conflict. Cultural background also influences the way individuals handle conflict.

Q: To what extent do cultural and gender differences in managing conflict apply to communication in your important relationships? How can you take these differences into account to manage conflict most productively?

Objective 11.5 Explain how the conflict management process can ideally resolve interpersonal conflicts.

In most circumstances a collaborative, win-win outcome is the ideal, and it can be achieved by following the guidelines outlined in the last section of this chapter.

Q: Consider how the steps described on pages 344–347 could help you manage a conflict more productively. What parts prove most helpful? Which are most difficult?

KEY TERMS

Accommodation (329)
Avoidance (328)
Collaboration (332)
Competition (330)
Complementary conflict (336)
Compromise (332)
Conflict (324)
Conflict rituals (340)
Contempt (340)
Criticism (339)
De-escalatory spiral (337)
Defensiveness (339)
Direct aggression (331)
Escalatory spiral (337)
Passive aggression (330)
Serial argument (338)
Stonewalling (340)
Symmetrical conflict (337)
Win-win problem solving (332)

ACTIVITIES

1. Interview someone who knows you well. Ask which personal conflict styles (avoidance, accommodation, etc.) you use most often and how they affect your relationship. Based on your findings, discuss whether different behavior might produce more productive results.

2. With a group of classmates, construct a hypothetical conflict scenario similar to the one between Cam and Lee (page 327). Describe how the parties involved might approach the conflict using each of the following styles:

a. Avoidance
b. Accommodation
c. Competition
d. Compromise
e. Collaboration

3. With a group of classmates, interview several people to answer the following questions about a particular relationship:

a. Is your relational style of handling conflict generally complementary or symmetrical? What are the consequences of this approach?
b. Would any of your conflicts be considered serial arguments? How do you handle these ongoing conflicts? How could you argue more constructively?
c. Have you experienced any of Gottman's "Four Horsemen" during conflict? If so, which ones? What has been the result?
d. What conflict rituals do you follow in this relationship? Are these rituals functional or dysfunctional? What might be better alternatives? Do gender and cultural background shape how you and your relational partners deal with conflict? If so, how?

4. As a class, construct a hypothetical conflict scenario similar to the one between Anant and Brook (page 348). Describe how the parties involved might engage in each step of the conflict management process outlined on pages 344–347. Try to generate and select actual solutions to the problem.

SCORING FOR ASSESSING YOUR COMMUNICATION (PAGE 335)

Add your responses to items 1, 6, 11, and 16. This is your *competition* score.
Add your responses to items 2, 7, 12, and 17. This is your *collaboration* score.
Add your responses to items 3, 8, 13, and 18. This is your *compromise* score.
Add your responses to items 4, 9, 14, and 19. This is your *avoidance* score.
Add your responses to items 5, 10, 15, and 20. This is your *accommodation* score.

Scores on each dimension can range from 4 to 20, with higher scores indicating more of a preference for that particular conflict style. You may wish to complete the assessment several times, with different people or different conflicts in mind, to get a better sense of your preferred conflict styles.

12

Communication Climate

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

12.1 Explain the nature of communication climates.
12.2 Describe how communication climates develop.
12.3 Distinguish the factors that create defensive versus supportive communication climates.
12.4 Identify the communication skills that create invitational climates.

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HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE your most important relationships? Fair and warm? Stormy? Hot? Cold? Just as physical locations have characteristic weather patterns, interpersonal relationships have unique climates. You can't measure the interpersonal climate by looking at a thermometer or glancing at the sky, but it's there nonetheless. Every relationship has a feeling, a pervasive mood that colors the goings-on of the participants.

WHAT IS A COMMUNICATION CLIMATE?

The term **communication climate** refers to the social tone of a relationship. A climate doesn't involve specific activities as much as the way people feel about each other as they carry out those activities. For example, consider two interpersonal communication classes. They meet for the same length of time and follow the same syllabus. One of these classes is a friendly, comfortable place to learn, whereas the other is cold and tense—even hostile. It's not the course content that differs—it's the way the people in the class feel about and treat each other (Johnson & LaBelle, 2016), even if the learning takes place online (Zhang et al., 2012).

Just as every classroom has a unique climate, so does every relationship. Romances, friendships, and families—just like neighborhoods, cities, and countries—can be defined by their social tone. Another obvious context for observing a climate's impact is the workplace, which may explain why the topic is so widely studied (Sopow, 2008; Yurtsever & de Rivera, 2010). Think for a moment: Have you ever held a job where backbiting, criticism, and suspicion were the norm? Or have you been lucky enough to work where the atmosphere was positive, encouraging, and supportive? If you've experienced both, you know what a difference climate makes. Other studies (e.g., Anderson et al., 2004; Bartels et al., 2008) demonstrate that employees have a higher level of commitment at jobs in which they experience a positive communication climate.

Metaphorically or literally, climates are shared by everyone within them. It's rare to find one person describing a relationship as open and positive while another characterizes it as cold and hostile. Also, just like weather patterns, communication climates can change over time. A relationship can be overcast at one time and sunny at another. Carrying the analogy further, we should say that communication climate forecasting is not a perfect science. Unlike the weather, however, people can change their communication climates—and that's why it's important to understand them. This chapter explores several climate issues: how communication climates develop, how and why we respond defensively in certain climates, and what we can do to create positive climates and transform negative ones.

Like the weather, relational climates can shape moods. ***What is the emotional climate in one of your most important relationships? How would you like to see it improve?***

HOW COMMUNICATION CLIMATES DEVELOP

How do some types of communication create a positive climate whereas others have the opposite effect? Essentially, communication climate is determined by the degree to which people see themselves as *valued*. Communicators who perceive others as liking, appreciating, and respecting them react positively, whereas those who feel unimportant or abused react negatively. Communication scholars use the term **confirming communication** to describe either direct or indirect messages that convey valuing (Dailey, 2010). In one form or another, confirming messages essentially say "you exist," "you matter," and "you're important." By contrast, **disconfirming communication** signals a lack of regard (Betts & Hinsz, 2013). In one form or another, disconfirming messages say, "You don't matter," "You're not important," or "You don't exist."

It's hard to overstate the importance of confirming messages and the impact of disconfirming ones. Children who lack confirmation suffer a broad range of emotional and behavioral problems (Osterman, 2001), whereas those who feel confirmed have more open communication with their parents, higher self-esteem, and lower levels of stress (Dailey, 2009, 2010). Confirming communication by teachers has been shown to enhance in-class participation, particularly from students who are apprehensive about talking (Hsu & Huang, 2017). A confirming climate is also important in marriage, where it is the best predictor of marital satisfaction (Weger, 2005). Marriage researcher John Gottman (2003) suggests that couples who have five times as many positive interactions as negative ones (e.g., more touching, smiling, laughing, and paying compliments) are likely to have happy and successful relationships. And if children see their parents regularly engage in confirming communication with each other, they are likely to replicate those patterns in their own romantic relationships (Young & Schrodt, 2016).

DARK SIDE OF COMMUNICATION

Cyberbullying: Inflicting Pain Online

More than a third of students report being bullied online during their school careers (Roberto et al., 2014). Although middle school is the peak period for cyberbullying, it can start as early as grade school and continue into the college years and beyond. Cyberbullying has been linked to a variety of negative consequences including poor academic performance, depression, withdrawal, drug and alcohol abuse, and even suicide.

A key to stopping cyberbullying is blowing the whistle on perpetrators. Unfortunately, most adolescents are unwilling to do so for reasons ranging from fear of reprisal to fear of losing their social media privileges (Cassidy et al., 2013). They are far more likely to tell their friends than adults about online harassment, so many school programs encourage peer-led support and intervention.

Cyberbullying will remain a problem as long as it stays a secret and if those who witness it fail to intervene (Brody & Vangelisti, 2016). Most schools and companies have policies that can help provide protection. If you're being bullied online, keep copies of the harassing messages—and then contact an appropriate teacher, administrator, or supervisor. And if you know someone who is being victimized, be receptive and help arrange intervention. Open communication is vital to bringing cyberbullying out of the shadows.

For more information on this important topic, go to www.StopBullying.gov.

The interpretation of a message as confirming or disconfirming is subjective. Consider, for example, times when you took a comment that might have sounded unsupportive to an outsider ("You're such a nerd!") as a sign of affection within your relationship. Likewise, a comment that might have been intended as helpful ("I'm telling you this for your own good . . .") could easily be regarded as an attack.

LEVELS OF MESSAGE CONFIRMATION

Figure 12.1 shows the range of confirming, disagreeing, and disconfirming messages, which are described in the following pages. Confirming messages show value to others, while disconfirming messages do not.

Confirming Messages

Even your best attempts at confirming messages can be misinterpreted. But research shows that three increasingly positive types of messages have the best chance of being perceived as confirming: recognition, acknowledgment, and endorsement (Cissna & Sieberg, 2006).

Recognition The most fundamental act of confirmation is **recognition**, or indicating your awareness of the other person. This can be done nonverbally—for example, by making eye contact or offering a smile. It can also be done verbally, with phrases such as "Glad to see you" or "I'll be right with you." On the other hand, avoiding eye contact can send a negative message. Consider what it's like when a store clerk fails to nonverbally signal that you're waiting for service. One national retailer strives to greet customers within "ten feet and ten seconds" of walking in, believing those moments to be vital in creating customer loyalty (Gallo, 2012).

Acknowledgment Paying attention to the ideas and feelings of others through **acknowledgment** is a stronger form of confirmation than simple recognition. Chapter 7 notes how listening and responding to another person demonstrates your interest and concern (Weger et al., 2014). Phrases such as "I see your point" or "I can understand how you feel that way" communicate acknowledgment—regardless of whether you agree with what's being said. As French philosopher Simone Weil put it, "Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity" (Saltz, 2012).

FIGURE 12.1 Message Types Along the Confirmation–Disconfirmation Spectrum

Endorsement Whereas acknowledgment communicates interest, **endorsement** means that you agree with or support another person. Endorsement is the strongest type of confirming message because it communicates the highest form of valuing. You can verbally endorse others by agreeing with them ("You're right about that"), offering compliments ("Nice job handling that situation"), or giving praise ("That's the best presentation I've seen this year"). Getting recognition like this on the job helps workers "feel interpersonally significant, needed, unique, and particularly successful" (Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2011, p. 12).

Endorsement can also happen nonverbally to positive effect (Dailey, 2008). For example, simple acts such as maintaining eye contact and nodding can confirm the value of a speaker's idea. On a more personal level, hugs and embraces can communicate endorsement in ways that words cannot.

Disagreeing Messages

Between confirming and disconfirming lies a type of message that isn't always easy to categorize. A **disagreeing message** essentially says, "You're wrong." In its most constructive form, disagreement includes two of the confirming components just described: recognition and acknowledgment. At its worst, a strong disagreeing message can be so devastating that the benefits of recognition and acknowledgment are lost. Two ways to disagree without necessarily being disconfirming are argumentativeness and complaining.

Argumentativeness Normally when we call a person "argumentative," we're making an unfavorable evaluation. However, the ability to create and deliver a sound argument is something we admire in lawyers, talk-show participants, and debaters. Taking a positive approach to the term, communication researchers define **argumentativeness** as presenting and defending positions on issues while opposing positions taken by others (Johnson et al., 2014). Argumentativeness—at least in the United States—can coincide with a number of positive attributes, such as leadership emergence (Limon & LaFrance, 2005), communicative competence (Hsu, 2010), and willingness to confront others when wronged (Miller & Roloff, 2014).

The *way* you present your ideas makes all the difference in maintaining a positive climate while arguing a point. It is crucial to be sure you are evaluating positions or issues, not attacking people. There's a world of difference between "That's a stupid idea" and "I disagree—let me explain why." The supportive kinds of messages outlined on pages 362–369 show how it is possible to argue in a respectful, constructive way.

Complaining When communicators don't want to argue (which requires interaction), but they still want to register dissatisfaction, they can engage in **complaining**. As is true of all disagreeing messages, some ways of complaining are more constructive than others. Satisfied couples tend to offer behavioral complaints ("You always throw your socks on the floor"), whereas unsatisfied couples make more complaints aimed at personal characteristics ("You're a slob") (Alberts, 1988, 1990). Personal complaints are more likely to result in an escalated conflict episode (Alberts & Driscoll, 1992).

ASSESSING YOUR COMMUNICATION

Confirming and Disconfirming Communication

With a particular friendship in mind, respond to each of the statements below using a scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 = "strongly disagree," and 5 = "strongly agree."

PART I

_____ **1.** My friend pays attention to me when I am talking.

_____ **2.** My friend usually listens carefully to what I have to say.

_____ **3.** When we talk, my friend does his/her part to keep the conversation going.

_____ **4.** I feel as though I am usually able to say everything I want to say without being judged.

_____ **5.** My friend makes eye contact while we talk.

_____ **6.** My friend usually accepts my point of view as accurate.

_____ **7.** My friend often acts interested in what I have to say.

PART II

_____ **1.** My friend teases me in a way that hurts my feelings.

_____ **2.** When I bring up something that upsets me, my friend tells me I shouldn't complain about it.

_____ **3.** My friend often tells me that my feelings or thoughts are wrong.

_____ **4.** My friend ignores me when I try to talk to him/her about something important.

_____ **5.** My friend often changes the subject to something he/she wants to discuss.

_____ **6.** My friend often seems uninvolved in our conversations.

_____ **7.** My friend often takes over the conversation and does not allow me to do much of the talking.

_____ **8.** My friend often interrupts me.

_____ **9.** My friend blames me when we have a disagreement about something.

_____ **10.** My friend often makes jokes at my expense.

Adapted from Bloch, A. S., & Weger, H. W., Jr. (2012 May). *Associations among friendship satisfaction, self-verification, self-enhancement, and friends' communication skill*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, Phoenix, AZ.

For scoring information, see page 379 at the end of the chapter.

The reason should be obvious—complaints about personal characteristics attack a more fundamental part of the presenting self. Talking about socks deals with a habit that can be changed; calling someone a slob is a character assault that is unlikely to be forgotten when the conflict is over.

Marriage researcher John Gottman (2000) has found that complaining is not a sign of a troubled relationship—in fact, it's usually healthy for spouses to get their concerns out in the open. Other scholars (Hall et al., 2013) agree that complaining can be "a relationship constructing tool [that] encourages bonding and increased intimacy within romantic relationships" (p. 59). However, when couples' complaining turns to criticism and contempt, it is often a symptom of relational trouble. (See the "Four Horsemen" in Chapter 11, pages 339–340.)

Disconfirming Messages

Disconfirming messages can be subtler than disagreeing ones but potentially more damaging. Disconfirming communication implicitly says, "You are not valued; you do not exist."

Disconfirmation can be communicated in small ways (Cissna & Sieburg, 2006). When you're making an important point during a conversation and a friend interrupts, you probably feel devalued. The same may be true if that friend goes off on an irrelevant tangent, gives an impersonal response ("It's no big deal—these things happen"), or ignores your message altogether. You can assess the level of confirmation and disconfirmation in one of your friendships by completing the Assessing Your Communication quiz on page 358. And the sidebar on this page describes how it's easy to feel disconfirmed by a partner's phone habits, even when they're unintentional.

FOCUS ON RESEARCH

Phubbing: Losing Out to Your Partner's Phone

How do you feel when you're talking with someone, only to have that person check or answer a cell phone mid-conversation? It can be disconfirming to be "phubbed"—a mashup of the words "phone" and "snubbed." James Roberts and Meredith David conducted a study to learn about the impact of phubbing on romantic partners.

The researchers developed a scale to measure phubbing, which includes items such as "My partner keeps his or her cell phone in their hand when he or she is with me" and "My partner glances at his/her cell phone when talking to me." Of the 453 U.S. adults surveyed, almost half said they had been phubbed by their partner, and nearly a quarter said that phubbing causes conflict in their relationships. In some cases, this correlated with lower life satisfaction and even depression.

Roberts and David note "it is ironic that cell phones, originally designed as a communication tool, may actually hinder rather than foster satisfying relationships." It might be wise to put cell phones away when you're with your loved ones—especially during serious conversations or important events.

Roberts, J. A., & David, M. E. (2016). My life has become a major distraction from my cell phone: Partner phubbing and relationship satisfaction among romantic partners. *Computers in Human Behavior, 54,* 134–141.

Media Clip

Victimized by Aggressiveness: *Moonlight*

In the opening scene of the film *Moonlight*, we see young Chiron (Alex Hibbert) pursued by a mob of screaming schoolmates. We soon learn why: He is gay in a world where masculinity is the currency of success for young black men. Because of his sexual orientation, Chiron becomes the object of aggressiveness. At every turn, he is rejected, disconfirmed, and persecuted. Even his closest friend betrays him at a critical moment.

As an adult, Chiron remains scarred by the damaging messages that plagued his youth. But as the film closes, viewers are left with the hope that his growing self-acceptance can lead to a measure of happiness.

Physicians take an oath to do no harm. *Moonlight* suggests that the same principle should guide all of us when we communicate with others.

But some disconfirming communication is more intentional, and usually more injurious. Two message types that fall into this category are aggressiveness and ostracism.

Aggressiveness Verbal **aggressiveness** is the tendency to attack another person's character, background, or identity (Xie et al., 2015). Unlike argumentativeness, aggressiveness demeans the worth of others and is corrosive to relationships (Roper et al., 2017). Name calling, put-downs, sarcasm, taunting, yelling, badgering—and even some types of humor (Bishop et al., 2012)—all are methods of "winning" disagreements at others' expense. Communication research has linked aggressiveness to a host of negative outcomes such as lowered self-esteem, occupational burnout, juvenile delinquency, depression, violence, and even mortality (Rancer & Avtgis, 2014).

One form of aggressiveness—bullying—has received a good deal of attention in the media and from communication scholars (Danielson & Emmers-Sommer, 2016; Goodboy et al., 2016). The word *bully* often conjures up images of a tough kid on the school playground, but bullying occurs in a variety of contexts. For instance, it can take place within families (Berry & Adams, 2016), and sibling bullying can have long-lasting negative effects (Bowes et al., 2014). Bullying can also occur between bosses and employees (Moss, 2016), doctors and nurses (Robbins, 2015), and professors and students (Martin et al., 2015). As the Dark Side box on page 355 describes, the internet gives bullies even more channels for engaging in verbal aggressiveness.

If you're on the receiving end of bullying behaviors, it's important to find appropriate and constructive ways to respond. It's possible to send clear, firm messages that are assertive (standing up for yourself) rather than aggressive (putting others down). For instructions on creating assertive "I" statements, refer to Chapter 5 (p. 153). For details on win-win versus win-lose approaches to conflict management, see Chapter 11 (p. 332). And later in this chapter, "The Language of Choice" describes ways to clearly articulate your thoughts, feelings, and wants to others—even if that means saying, "I will not tolerate this treatment."

Ostracism It's bad enough to be treated poorly. It can be even worse to be ignored altogether. **Ostracism** has been called "the social death penalty"

because it purposely excludes others from interaction (Parramore, 2014). Most people can recall hurtful childhood experiences of being ostracized by a group (Wölfer & Scheithauer, 2014). This kind of disconfirmation can also happen in adulthood. Workplace studies show that employees would rather receive negative attention from bosses and coworkers than no attention at all. Many report that ostracism is even more painful and damaging than harassment (O'Reilly et al., 2015).

Ostracism usually involves exclusion from a group, but it can take also place in one-on-one interaction. Chapter 11 described several variations on this theme: the silent treatment (p. 331), ghosting (p. 329), and stonewalling (p. 340). The power of ostracism illustrates a principle introduced in Chapter 1: You can't *not* communicate. Withholding interaction from others sends a message. In some cases it can be the most disconfirming message of all.

CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF DEFENSIVENESS

It's no surprise that some disagreeing and most disconfirming messages can pollute a communication climate. Perhaps the most predictable reaction to a hostile or indifferent message is defensiveness.

The word *defensiveness* suggests protecting yourself from attack, but what kind of attack if not physical? To answer this question, we need to talk more about notions of *presenting self* and *face*, both of which were introduced in Chapter 3. Recall that the presenting self consists of the physical traits, personality characteristics, attitudes, aptitudes, and all the other parts of the image you want to present to the world. Actually, it is a mistake to talk about a single face; we try to project different selves to different people. (For instance, you might try to impress a potential employer with your seriousness but want your friends to see you as a joker.)

When others are willing to accept and acknowledge important parts of our presenting image, there is no reason to feel defensive. However, when others confront us with **face-threatening acts**—messages we perceive as challenging the image we want to project—we are likely to resist what they say. Defensiveness, then, is the process of protecting our presenting self, our face. Although responding defensively to a face-threatening attack may seem logical, over time, defensiveness erodes relationship stability (Lannin et al., 2013). (Again, recall the discussion of Gottman's "Four Horsemen" in Chapter 11.)

To understand how defensiveness operates, imagine what might happen if an important part of your presenting self were attacked. For instance, suppose an instructor criticized you in front of the class for making a mistake. Or consider how you would feel if a friend called you self-centered or your boss labeled you as lazy. You would probably feel threatened if these attacks were untrue. But your own experience will probably show that you sometimes respond defensively even when you know that others' criticism is justified. For instance, you have probably responded defensively at times when you *did* make a mistake, act selfishly, or cut corners in your work (Zhang & Stafford, 2008). In fact, we often feel most defensive when criticism is right on target (Becker et al., 2008). Later in this chapter, we discuss how to respond nondefensively in such situations.

A defensive attitude can shut down productive communication. ***What triggers defensiveness in your important relationships? How can you apply information from this chapter to reduce it?***

So far, we have talked about defensiveness as if it were only the responsibility of the person who felt threatened. If this were the case, then the prescription would be simple: Grow a thick skin, admit your flaws, and stop trying to manage impressions. This approach isn't just unrealistic—it also ignores the role played by those who send face-threatening messages. In fact, competent communicators protect others' face needs as well as their own. Skilled instructors carefully protect their students' presenting faces, especially when offering constructive criticism (Trees et al., 2009). This facework leads to less defensive responses from their students. Similarly, wise students craft their emails politely when making requests of their teachers, showing them appropriate respect (Bolkan & Holmgren, 2012). Findings like this make it clear that defensiveness is *interactive:* All communicators contribute to the climate of a relationship.

As a practical example, communication researcher Sarah Tracy (2002) analyzed emergency call-center interactions to investigate the role of defensiveness in a communication climate. Tracy concluded that callers become defensive when they perceive call-takers' questions to be face threatening, and she offered suggestions for making the climate more supportive. For instance, changing "Tell me if . . ." to "Can you tell me if . . ." adds only two words—but those words soften the inquiry and make it more of a request than a demand. Changes like this take very little extra time, and they have the potential to keep the climate supportive rather than defensive—and in 911 calls, that's a small investment that can save a life.

CREATING SUPPORTIVE CLIMATES

Even the most positive message isn't guaranteed to create a positive climate. Praise can be interpreted as sarcasm; an innocent smile can be perceived as a sneer; an offer to help can be seen as condescension. Because human communication is so complex, there aren't any foolproof words, phrases, or formulas for creating positive climates. Nonetheless, research suggests strategies that can increase the odds of creating and maintaining positive relational climates—even when the message you're delivering is a tough one.

Several decades ago, psychologist Jack Gibb isolated six types of defense-arousing communication and six contrasting behaviors that seem to reduce defensiveness (1961; see also 2008). These "Gibb categories" are listed in Table 12.1. Gibb's findings have commonsense appeal and multiple applications. As a result, they've played an important part in

TABLE 12.1 The Gibb Categories of Defense-Provoking Versus Supportive Behaviors

Defense-Provoking Behaviors	Supportive Behaviors
1. Evaluation	1. Description
2. Control	2. Problem Orientation
3. Strategy	3. Spontaneity
4. Neutrality	4. Empathy
5. Superiority	5. Equality
6. Certainty	6. Provisionalism

communication textbooks, training seminars, journals, and research studies (e.g., Becker et al., 2008; Forward et al., 2011). Understanding them helps explain how positive climates can be created by sending supportive rather than defense-provoking messages.

EVALUATION VERSUS DESCRIPTION

The first type of defense-arousing message is **evaluation**, which judges another person, usually in a negative way. For instance, consider this message: "You don't care about me!" Evaluative messages such as this possess several characteristics that make them face threatening. They judge what the other person is feeling rather than describing the speaker's thoughts, feelings, and wants. They don't explain how the speaker arrived at his or her conclusion, and they lack specifics. Furthermore, they're often phrased in the kind of defense-arousing "you" language described in Chapter 5.

Do the climate-threatening properties of evaluative messages mean it's impossible to register a legitimate complaint? No. They simply mean that you must be alert to more constructive ways to do so. **Description** is a way to offer your thoughts, feelings, and wants without judging the listener. Descriptive messages make documented observations that are specific and concrete. They focus on behavior that can be changed rather than on personal characteristics that cannot. In addition, descriptive messages often use "I" language, which tends to provoke less defensiveness than "you" language (Proctor & Wilcox, 1993). Contrast the evaluative "You don't care about me" with this more descriptive message: "I'm sorry we don't spend as much time together as we did during the summer. When we don't talk

during the week, I sometimes feel unimportant. Maybe we could try to text each other once a day—that would mean a lot to me."

Let's look at more examples of the difference between evaluative and descriptive messages:

Evaluation	Description
You're not making any sense.	I'm not clear on the point you're making.
You're inconsiderate.	I would appreciate it if you'd let me know when you're running late—I was worried.
That's an ugly tablecloth.	I'm not crazy about big blue stripes; I like something more subtle.

Note several characteristics of these descriptive messages. First, their focus is on the speaker's thoughts, feelings, and wants, with little or no judgment of the other person. Second, the messages address specific behaviors rather than making sweeping character generalizations. The messages also provide information about how the speaker arrived at these conclusions. Finally—and perhaps most important—notice that each of the descriptive statements is just as honest as its evaluative counterpart. Once you have learned to speak descriptively, you can be straightforward while avoiding personal attacks that can poison a climate.

CONTROL VERSUS PROBLEM ORIENTATION

A second defense-provoking message involves some attempt to control another person. **Controlling communication** occurs when a sender seems to be imposing a solution on the receiver, with little regard for that person's needs or interests. The object of control can involve almost anything: where to eat dinner, how to spend a large sum of money, or whether to remain in a relationship. The channel can range from words, to gestures, to tone of voice, and the control can be accomplished through status, insistence on obscure or irrelevant rules, or physical power. No matter the object, channel, or form of control, the controller generates hostility. The unspoken message such behavior communicates is "I know what's best for you, and if you do as I say, we'll get along."

Even if insisting on your own way leads to a short-term victory, the long-term consequences may not be worth it. ***Do you seek control at the expense of others? If so, what are the relational costs?***

In **problem orientation**, by contrast, communicators focus on finding a solution that satisfies both their own needs and those of the others involved. The goal here isn't to "win" at the expense of your partner but to work out some arrangement in which everybody feels like a winner. (Chapter 11 has a great deal to say about "win-win" problem solving as a way to find problem-oriented solutions.) Problem orientation is often typified by "we" language (see Chapter 5), which suggests the speaker is making decisions *with* rather than *for* other people (Seider et al., 2009). In one study, the most effective university chairpersons were characterized as using few control communications and adopting a problem orientation (Czech & Forward, 2010).

Here are some examples of how some controlling versus problem-oriented messages might sound:

Controlling	Problem Oriented
Get off your phone—now! I need to talk to you.	I really need to talk soon. Can you take a break?
There's only one way to handle this problem . . .	Looks like we have a problem. Let's work out a solution we can both live with.
Either you start working harder, or you're fired!	The production in your department hasn't been as high as I'd hoped. Any ideas on what we could do?

STRATEGY VERSUS SPONTANEITY

Gibb uses the word **strategy** to characterize defense-arousing messages in which speakers hide their ulterior motives. The terms *dishonesty* and *manipulation* reflect the nature of strategy. Even if the intentions that motivate strategic communication are honorable, the victim of deception is likely to feel offended at being played for a sucker (Tsang, 2006).

As Chapter 7 explained, counterfeit questions are a form of strategic communication because they try to trap others into desired responses. Many sales techniques are strategic; for example, they may give customers limited information and then make it difficult to say no. This is not to say that all sales techniques are wrong or unethical, but most strategic ones aren't well suited for interpersonal relationships. If you've ever become defensive when you thought a friend was doing a "sales job" on you, you understand the concept.

In contrast with strategy, **spontaneity** is being honest with others rather than manipulating them. What it *doesn't* mean is blurting out what you're thinking as soon as an idea comes to you (see the Focus on Research sidebar on page 366). Gibb recognized the dangers of hidden agendas that others both sense and resist. You can probably recall times when someone asked you a question and you suspiciously responded with "Hmmm . . . why do you want to know?" Your defensive antennae were up because you detected an underlying strategy. If the person had told you up front why he or she was asking the question, then your defenses probably would have been lowered. Here are some examples that illustrate the difference between strategy and spontaneity:

Strategy	Spontaneity
What are you doing Friday after work?	I have a piano I need to move Friday after work. Can you give me a hand?
Have you ever considered another line of work?	I'm concerned about your job performance over the last year; let's set up a time to talk about it.
Ali and Kasey go out to dinner every week.	I'd like to go out for dinner more often.

This is a good place to pause and talk about larger issues regarding the Gibb model. First, Gibb's emphasis on being direct is better suited for a low-context culture such as that of the United States, which values straight talk, than for high-context cultures. Second, there are ways in which each of the communication approaches Gibb labels as "supportive" can be used to exploit others and, therefore, violate the spirit of positive climate building. For instance, consider spontaneity. Although it sounds paradoxical at first, spontaneity can be a strategy, too. Sometimes you'll see people using honesty in a calculating way, being just frank enough to win someone's trust or sympathy for the purpose of manipulation. This calculated frankness is probably the most defense-arousing strategy of all, because once you're on to the manipulation, there's almost no chance you'll ever trust that person again.

NEUTRALITY VERSUS EMPATHY

Gibb used the term **neutrality** to describe a fourth behavior that arouses defensiveness. Probably a better word would be *indifference*. For example, 911 emergency telephone dispatchers are taught to be neutral to calm

FOCUS ON RESEARCH

A Blurt Can Hurt

Gibb's model recommends "spontaneity" as a way of creating a supportive climate. But that doesn't mean *blurting*—indiscriminately saying whatever you're thinking and feeling. Dale Hample and his colleagues show that these kinds of impulsive disclosures are usually detrimental to interpersonal communication.

The researchers asked participants to write about blurting episodes and to complete a battery of scales about blurting. Interestingly, *all* of the participants' episodes were about negative or regrettable comments they made. Although it's possible to blurt good news or positive appraisals, that's not what the respondents thought of when they recalled speaking before thinking.

Not surprisingly, analysis showed that habitual blurting was associated with a variety of less-than-positive traits. Blurters tend to be high in verbal aggressiveness, psychoticism, and neuroticism; they rate low in empathy and perspective taking. They are also relatively unconcerned about the harm their comments might do to others and to their relationships.

Think back to the description of communication competence in Chapter 1, and you'll realize that blurting is at odds with most of the principles outlined there. Whether blurting is due to a lack of will or skill, one thing seems clear: There is interpersonal value in pausing to think before speaking your mind.

Hample, D., Richards, A. S., & Skubisz, C. (2013). Blurting. *Communication Monographs, 80,* 503–532.

down the caller, but they shouldn't communicate indifference or a lack of caring (Shuler & Sypher, 2000). Using Gibb's terminology, a neutral attitude is disconfirming because it communicates a lack of concern for the welfare of another and implies that the other person isn't very important to you. The poor effects of neutrality become apparent when you consider the hostility that most people have for the large, impersonal organizations with which they have to deal: "They think of me as a number instead of a person"; "I felt as if I were being handled by computers and not human beings." These common statements reflect reactions to being treated in an indifferent, neutral way.

The behavior that contrasts with neutrality is **empathy**, showing care for the feelings of another. Research has shown that empathy minimizes potential threats to self-concept (Bradley & Campbell, 2016). It's important to note that accepting others' feelings and putting yourself in their place is separate from agreeing with them. By simply letting someone know about your care and respect, you'll be acting in a supportive way. You read about the concept of empathy in Chapter 4 and the skill of empathizing in Chapter 7; let's see what empathic messages look like when contrasted with neutral ones:

Neutrality	Empathy
This is what happens when you don't plan properly.	I'm so sorry this didn't turn out the way you expected.
Sometimes things just don't work out. That's the way it goes.	I know you put a lot of time and effort into this project.
Don't get too excited—everybody gets promoted sooner or later.	I'll bet you're pretty excited about the promotion.

SUPERIORITY VERSUS EQUALITY

A fifth behavior creating a defensive climate involves **superiority**, sending patronizing messages either explicitly or implicitly. A body of research describes how such messages irritate receivers ranging from young students

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to senior citizens (Draper, 2005; Harwood et al., 1997). Any message that suggests "I'm better than you" is likely to arouse feelings of defensiveness in the recipients. Research supports what most of us know from experience: We dislike people who communicate superiority, especially when it involves an explicit comparison with others (Hoorens et al., 2012).

We often communicate with people who possess less talent or knowledge than we do, but it isn't necessary to convey an attitude of superiority in these situations. Gibb found ample evidence that many who have superior skills and talents are capable of projecting feelings of **equality** rather than superiority. Such people communicate that although they may have greater talent in certain areas, they see other human beings as having just as much worth.

Equality is put to the test when a person doesn't have superior skills yet is in a position of authority (Beck & Beck, 1996). Supervisors sometimes have less expertise in certain areas than their subordinates but believe it would be beneath them to admit it. Think for a moment: You've probably been in situations where you knew more about the subject than the person in charge—be it a boss, a teacher, a parent, or a salesperson—yet this person acted as if he or she knew more. Did you feel defensive? No doubt. Did that person feel defensive? Probably. You both were challenging each other's presenting self, so the climate most likely became hostile. A truly secure person can treat others with equality even when there are obvious differences in knowledge, talent, and status. Doing so creates a positive climate in which ideas are evaluated not on the basis of who contributed them, but rather on the merit of the ideas themselves.

What does equality sound like? Here are some examples:

Superiority	**Equality**
When you get to be in my position someday, *then* you'll understand.	I'd like to hear how the issue looks to you. Then I can tell you how it looks to me.
No, not that way! Let me show you how to do it right.	What if you tried it this way?
You really believe *that*?	Here's another way to think about it . . .

CERTAINTY VERSUS PROVISIONALISM

Have you ever run into people who are positive they're right, who know that theirs is the only or proper way of doing something, who insist that they have all the facts and need no additional information? If you have, you know the defense-arousing behavior Gibb calls **certainty**.

Communicators who dogmatically regard their own opinions with certainty while disregarding the ideas of others demonstrate a lack of regard for others. It's likely the receiver will take the certainty as a personal affront and react defensively.

In contrast to certainty is **provisionalism**, in which people express openness to others' ideas and opinions. You may have strong opinions yourself, but in this supportive style of communication, you acknowledge that you don't have a corner on the truth. Provisionalism often surfaces

in word choice. Whereas people acting with certainty regularly use the terms *can't*, *never*, *always*, *must*, and *have to*, those acting with provisionalism use *perhaps*, *maybe*, *possibly*, *might*, and *could*. It's not that provisional people are spineless; they simply recognize that discussion is aided by open-minded messages. Researchers found that when teachers use provisional language, it helps motivate students (Katt & Collins, 2013). For instance, students responded more favorably to the critique "Your introduction could have been developed more thoroughly" than to the starker "The introduction was not well developed."

Let's look at some examples:

Certainty	Provisionalism
That will *never* work!	My guess is that you'll run into problems with that approach.
You'll hate that class! Stay away from it!	I didn't like that class very much; I'm not sure you would, either.
You won't get anywhere without a college education—mark my words.	I think it's important to get that degree. I found it was hard to land an interview until I had one.

You've probably noticed a good deal of overlap among the various Gibb categories. For instance, look at the final example under provisionalism. The statement is likely to create a positive climate not only because it is provisional rather than certain, but also because it is descriptive rather than evaluative, problem oriented rather than controlling, and equal rather than superior. You may also have noticed a tone underlying all of the supportive examples: *respect*. By valuing and confirming others—even if you disagree with them—you create a respectful climate that helps enhance a positive communication climate, both now and in future interactions.

Media Clip

Changing the Climate, Ever So Slowly: *Doc Martin*

Dr. Martin Ellingham (Martin Clunes) fits a familiar stereotype on TV medical shows: He's long on technical ability but short on bedside manner (think *House M.D.* or some doctors on *Grey's Anatomy*). To use concepts from earlier chapters, Doc Martin is effective but not appropriate in his communication competence (Chapter 1). He's also more book smart than emotionally intelligent (Chapter 8), similar to Sheldon on *The Big Bang Theory* (p. 228).

Luckily for Ellingham, his romantic partner Louisa (Caroline Catz) has strong interpersonal skills, and she coaches him to become kinder and gentler with his patients. In the language of Gibb's model, Ellingham learns to avoid neutrality ("You have a brain tumor and it's inoperable") and lead with empathy ("I have some difficult news to share with you"). He eases back on superiority ("I'm the doctor and I know what's best") in favor of more equality ("Tell me your symptoms and how you've been treating them"). Certainty ("This is clearly your problem") gives way to provisionalism ("Let's run some tests to be sure").

It would be nice to say that Ellingham makes these changes quickly and sticks to them. But as fans of this long-running British series know, shifts in climate—both meteorological and communicative—often move slowly.

INVITATIONAL COMMUNICATION

It might be tempting to view the prescriptions in this chapter as fail-proof: Just adopt certain phrases and methods, and your interpersonal problems will be solved. But of course we all know it doesn't work that way.

Becoming a truly competent communicator requires developing an interpersonal philosophy that undergirds what you say and do. Communication scholars Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin (1995; see also Modesti, 2012) have identified such an approach. Their study began in the field of rhetoric, which is traditionally associated with persuasion. Foss and Griffin offer an alternative view they call *invitational*:

> Invitational rhetoric can be viewed as a communication exchange in which participants create an environment where growth and change can occur but where changing others is neither the ultimate goal nor the criterion for success in the interaction. (Bone et al., 2008, p. 436)

Invitational communication is an approach that welcomes others to see your point of view and to freely share their own. In an invitational climate, communicators offer ideas without coercion; they listen to ideas with an open mind; they exchange ideas without pressure. It doesn't mean they don't critically appraise the messages they hear. They also don't waffle about things they believe in. What it means is they endeavor to create a supportive climate based on *value*, *safety*, and *freedom*, leading to a greater *civility* in their communication (Bone et al., 2008).

Earlier in this chapter, you read about valuing as the key component of confirming communication. To describe how safety and freedom tie into invitational communication and civility, it might be easier to describe what *incivility* looks like. Here's a brief review of some Dark Side topics in this book that illustrate uncivil, noninvitational communication:

- Harmful labels and slurs (p. 50) denigrate others' value and worth, using words in ways that demean and belittle.
- The gaslight effect (p. 126) imposes one person's perception on another's in an attempt to manipulate and control.
- Ghosting (p. 329) disconfirms others, treating them as if they don't exist.
- Cyberbullying (p. 355) communicates to its victims, "You have no value, and you're never safe."

In contrast to these uncivil approaches, many of the skills described in this book—perception checking, responsible language, responsive listening—are rooted in an invitational approach to interpersonal communication. Building on their foundation, let's look briefly at two more ways to put this invitational philosophy into action: using the language of choice and responding nondefensively to criticism.

Watch and Discuss

Look up and watch Sally Kohn's presentation on "Emotional Correctness."

1) How does she use *invitational communication* with those who disagree with her?
2) What could make your communication more invitational?

THE LANGUAGE OF CHOICE

Chapter 5 explained the relationship between pronouns such as *I*, *we*, and *you* and the language of responsibility. The words that follow these pronouns are also important ingredients in responsible communication (Zeman, 2010). Read the following statements and consider how you feel about them (assume they involve activities you'd rather not do):

"I *have to* talk to my neighbor about the barking dog."
"I *should* be nicer to my roommate."
"I *ought to* be more assertive."
"I *can't* take this anymore."
"I had *no choice*—I *had to* tell her."

It's likely that you read those lines in a somber tone of voice and that you were left with a sense of heaviness and pressure. Consider how those same phrases might conjure a different feeling if worded this way (with possible reasons in parentheses):

"I'm going to talk to my neighbor about the barking dog" (I want to settle this problem).
"I will start being nicer to my roommate" (I want a more pleasant relationship).
"I'm determined to be more assertive" (I want to be a more effective communicator).
"I'm not going to take this anymore" (I want change).
"I decided to tell her" (I wanted her to know).

Notice how this list describes *choices* instead of *obligations*. The wording focuses on decisions made (e.g., *will*, *going to*), not grudging acquiescence (e.g., *should*, *have to*). You probably found the second list more motivating than the first, and research supports this notion. When participants in one study said "I *don't* eat unhealthy snacks" (suggesting personal choice) instead of "I *can't* eat unhealthy snacks" (suggesting external constraint), they had greater willpower and changes in their eating habits (Patrick & Hagtvedt, 2012). The researchers call this "empowered refusal" and maintain that word choice plays a significant role in the process. In the language of invitational communication, empowering words identify your *freedom* to make choices. In essence, you're inviting yourself to take charge of your decisions.

Harvard psychologist Susan David (2016) maintains that labeling a goal as a "have to" (as in "I have to finish this paper") increases emotional stress and decreases the likelihood of achieving that goal. However, turning that "have to" into a "want to" facilitates goal achievement: "I want to finish this paper because I want to do well in this course, and I also want to enjoy the rest of the weekend." She notes that rewording goals is often an important component in perceiving them differently:

> We all fall into these subtle traps of language and thinking: "I *have to* be on dad duty today," or "I *have to* attend another boring meeting." When we do this, we forget that our current circumstances are often

> the result of earlier choices we made in service of our values: "I *want to* be a father," or "I love the work that I do and *want to* excel at my job." (p. 152)

Once you've adopted the language of choice for yourself, consider what it's like to offer that same choice and freedom to others:

"You should"	becomes	"I'm going to" (and you can join me if you want)
"You have to"	becomes	"You're welcome to"
"We can't"	becomes	"I don't want to" (do you?)

One study found that when a request is followed by the phrase "but you are free to say no," respondents are actually more likely to comply with the request (Carpenter, 2013). The concept is simple: People don't like feeling pressured or having their options limited or prescribed. When you extend the right of refusal, others are more open to respond favorably. Of course, it's best when the phrase "but you are free" isn't just a technique to get others to say yes. The goal of invitational communication is to genuinely offer freedom of choice, which people value and appreciate.

As mentioned earlier, there's nothing magical about these words and phrases—they simply reflect an invitational attitude. In essence they say, "Here is what's going on inside me; tell me what's going on inside you." They are also best understood as part of an exchange. Consider how phrases such as these demonstrate value, safety, and freedom for both parties in a dialogue:

"I hold a different opinion, but I understand why that's important to you."
"I have some thoughts on the matter—would you like to hear them?"
"I welcome your input" (I may or may not use it, but I value what you have to say).
"Here is something I feel strongly about" (it's okay if you don't).

This final statement illustrates an important point. Invitational communicators not only extend freedom to others, but they exercise it themselves. It's fine to let people know what you think, feel, and want, and to have values, beliefs, and convictions that guide your choices. The key is communicating those ideas responsibly rather than aggressively. Recognize that your perspective might not be shared by others, so offer it in a way that invites rather than imposes.

RESPONDING NONDEFENSIVELY TO CRITICISM

The world would be a happier place if everyone communicated invitationally. But sometimes when we invite others to offer their point of view, they criticize and attack. In those situations, it can be challenging to remain civil. How can you respond nondefensively when faced with

@work Taking the High Road: Keeping Cool Under Fire

Sarcasm. Condescension. Hostility. Ostracism. The climate at some jobs isn't just chilly; it's downright cold. The problem may be getting worse: By some estimates, workplace incivility has doubled over the past two decades (Schilpzand et al., 2016).

How does a communication climate become so toxic? Scholars say it starts with "low-intensity negative behaviors" such as rudeness and impoliteness (Foulk et al., 2016). Once incivility gets a toehold in the workplace, it can spread virally—just like the emotional contagion described in Chapter 8. Responding angrily to discourteous behavior—even if you're justified—can create the kind of escalatory spirals explained in Chapter 11.

Remaining graceful under fire is easier said than done. Some psychologists suggest that incivility wears down beleaguered employees, reducing their ability to take the high road (Rosen et al., 2016).

One strategy for keeping your cool in the face of rudeness is to have a plan handy—a set of responses you can use without having to invent them on the spot. The non-defensive responses described in this section can be such tools; you might ask sincere questions and agree with your critics. Even when you don't win over a rude boss, colleague, or customer, you can feel good about having behaved honorably.

criticism? The following pages introduce two such methods: seeking more information and agreeing with the critic. Despite their apparent simplicity, they have proven to be among the most valuable skills communicators can learn.

Seek More Information

It's unwise to respond to a critical attack until you truly understand what the other person has said (Gold & Castillo, 2010). Even comments that on first consideration appear to be totally unjustified or foolish may contain important truths.

One way to seek more information is to *ask for specifics*. Often the vague attack of a critic is virtually useless, even if you sincerely want to change. Abstract accusations such as "you're being unfair" or "you never help out" can be difficult to understand. In such cases, it is a good idea to request more specific information from the senders, inviting them to explain their position more clearly. Before agreeing with or disputing an accusation, you might ask, "What do I *do* that's unfair?" or "When haven't I helped out?" Remember that it's important to ask these kinds of questions in a tone of voice that suggests you genuinely want to learn more about the other person's perception.

Sometimes your critics won't be able to define precisely the behavior they find offensive—or they may be reluctant to tell you. In instances such as these, you can often learn more clearly what is bothering your critic by *guessing at the specifics* of a complaint. Like the technique of asking for specifics, guessing must be done with goodwill if it's to produce satisfying results.

You need to convey to the critic that for both of your sakes you're truly interested in finding out what is the matter. Here are some typical questions you might hear from someone guessing about the details of another's criticism:

"So you object to the language I used in writing the paper. Was my language too formal?"

"Okay, I understand that you think the outfit looks funny. What is it that's so bad? Is it the color? Does it have something to do with the fit? The design?"

"When you say that I'm not doing my share around the house, do you mean that I haven't been helping enough with the cleaning?"

Another strategy is to draw out confused or reluctant speakers by *paraphrasing* their thoughts and feelings, using the reflective listening skills described in Chapter 7. By clarifying or amplifying what you understand critics to be saying, you may learn more about their objections (Homburg & Fürst, 2007). A brief dialogue between a disgruntled customer and a store manager who is an invitational listener might sound like this:

Customer: The way you people run this store is disgusting! I just want to tell you that I'll never shop here again.

Manager: (*reflecting the customer's feeling*) It seems that you're quite upset. Can you tell me the problem?

C: Your salespeople never help a customer find anything around here.

M: So you didn't get enough help locating the items you were looking for, is that it?

C: I spent 20 minutes looking around in here before I even talked to a clerk.

M: So what you're saying is that the clerks seemed to be ignoring the customers?

C: No. They were all busy with other people. It just seems to me that you ought to have enough help around to handle the crowds that come in at this hour.

M: I understand now. What frustrated you the most was the fact that we didn't have enough staff to serve you promptly.

C: That's right. I have no complaint with the service I get once I'm waited on, and I've always thought you had a good selection here. It's just that I'm too busy to wait so long for help.

M: Well, I'm glad you brought this to my attention. We certainly don't want loyal customers going away mad. I'll try to see that it doesn't happen again.

Finding a way to sincerely agree with criticism can be disarming. ***When could you agree with your critic without giving up what's important to you? How might this approach change the climate of your relationship?***

Agree with the Critic

Another method for responding invitationally to criticism is to agree with the critic. But, you protest, how can I honestly agree with comments I don't believe are true? The following pages will answer this question by showing how you can acknowledge and accept the other person's point of view while maintaining your position.

One way to agree with the critic is to *agree with the truth*. For instance, you agree with the truth when another person's criticism is factually correct:

"You're right; I am angry."
"I suppose I was just being defensive."
"Now that you mention it, I did get pretty sarcastic."

Agreeing with the truth seems quite sensible when you realize that certain matters are indisputable. If you agree to be somewhere at 4:00 P.M. but don't show up until 5:00, you are late, no matter how good your explanation for tardiness is. If you've broken a borrowed object, run out of gas, or failed to finish a job you started, there's no point in denying the fact. In the same way, if you're honest, you will have to agree with many interpretations of your behavior, even when they're not flattering. You do get angry, act foolishly, fail to listen, and behave inconsiderately. Once you acknowledge this, your communication can become more invitational—as this teacher–student dialogue demonstrates:

Teacher: Look at this paper! It's only two pages long, and it contains 12 misspelled words. I'm afraid you have a real problem with your writing.

Student: You know, you're right. I know I don't spell well at all.

T: I don't know what's happening in the lower grades. They just don't seem to be turning out people who can write a simple, declarative sentence.

S: You're not the first person I've heard say that.

T: I should think you'd be upset by the fact that after so much time in English composition classes you haven't mastered the basics of spelling.

S: You're right. It does bother me.

Notice that in agreeing with the teacher's comments the student did not in any way demean herself. Even though there might have been extenuating circumstances to account for her lack of skill, the student didn't find it necessary to justify her errors. She wasn't saddled with the burden of pretending to be perfect. By simply agreeing with the facts, she was able to maintain her dignity and avoid an unproductive argument.

Another way to agree with the critic is to *agree in principle*. Criticism often comes in the form of abstract ideals against which you're unfavorably compared:

"I wish you wouldn't spend so much time on your work. Relaxation is important too, you know."
"You shouldn't expect so much from your kids. Nobody's perfect."
"What do you mean, you're not voting? The government will get better only when people like you take more of an interest in it."
"You mean you're still upset by that remark? You ought to learn how to take a joke better."

In cases such as these, you can accept the principle on which the criticism is based and still behave as you have been. After all, some rules do allow occasional exceptions, and people often are inconsistent. Consider how you might sincerely agree with the preceding criticisms without necessarily changing your behavior:

"You're right. I am working hard now. It probably is unhealthy, but finishing the job is worth the extra strain to me."
"I guess my expectations for the kids are awfully high, and I don't want to drive them crazy. I hope I'm not making a mistake."
"You're right: if everybody stopped voting, the system would fall apart."
"Maybe I *would* be happier if I could take a joke in stride. I'm not ready to do that, though, at least not for jokes like that one."

What about times when there seems to be no basis whatsoever for agreeing with your critics? You've listened carefully and asked questions to make sure you understand the objections, but the more you listen, the more positive you are that they are totally out of line. In these cases, you can at least *agree with the critic's perception*. Such responses tell critics that you're acknowledging the reasonableness of their perceptions, even though you don't agree or wish to change your behavior. This lets you avoid debates over who is right and who is wrong, which can turn an exchange of ideas into an argument. Notice the difference in the following two scenes.

Disputing the perception defensively:

A: I don't see how you can stand to be around Josh. The guy is so crude that he gives me the creeps.

B: What do you mean, crude? He's a really nice guy. I think you're just touchy.

A: Touchy! If it's touchy to be offended by disgusting behavior, then I'm guilty.

B: You're not guilty about anything. It's just that you're too sensitive when people kid around.

A: Too sensitive, huh? I don't know what's happened to you. You used to have such good judgment about people. . . .

Agreeing with the perception:

A: I don't see how you can stand to be around Josh. The guy is so crude that he gives me the creeps.

B: Well, I enjoy being around him, but I guess I can see how his jokes would be offensive to some people.

A: You're damn right! I don't see how you can put up with him.

B: Yeah. I guess if you didn't appreciate his humor, you wouldn't want to have much to do with him.

All these responses to criticism may appear to buy peace at the cost of denying your feelings. However, as you can see by now, counterattacking usually makes matters worse. The invitational responses you have just learned won't solve problems or settle disputes by themselves. Nevertheless, they *will* make a constructive dialogue possible, setting the stage for a productive solution.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Objective 12.1 Explain the nature of communication climates.

Communication climate refers to the social tone of a relationship. The most influential factor in shaping a communication climate is the degree to which the people involved see themselves as valued. Messages have differing levels of confirmation, which we can categorize as confirming, disagreeing, or disconfirming.

Q: Using weather terminology, how would you describe the communication climate in one of your important relationships?

Objective 12.2 Describe how communication climates develop.

Confirming messages, which communicate "you exist and are valued," may involve endorsement or acknowledgment; at minimum, they involve recognition. Disagreeing messages, which communicate "you are wrong," use argumentativeness and complaining. Disconfirming messages, which communicate "you do not exist and are not valued," include aggressiveness and ostracism. Face-threatening acts lead to defensiveness, the process of protecting our presenting self.

Q: Identify representative confirming, disagreeing, and/or disconfirming messages that create and maintain the climate you identified in Objective 12.1.

Objective 12.3 Distinguish the factors that create defensive versus supportive communication climates.

Jack Gibb suggested a variety of ways to create a positive and nondefensive communication climate. These include being descriptive rather than evaluative, problem oriented rather than controlling, spontaneous rather than strategic, empathic rather than neutral, equal rather than superior, and provisional rather than certain.

Q: Recall an incident in which both you and the other communicator became defensive. Which parts of your face needs were you and the other person protecting? Which of Gibb's categories triggered defensive responses?

Objective 12.4 Identify the communication skills that create invitational climates.

Communicators can help create an invitational climate by using the language of choice. This involves describing decisions and options ("I'm going to"; "Do you want to?") rather than obligations and imposition ("I have to"; "You should").

When faced with criticism, there are two alternatives to responding defensively: (1) seeking additional information from the critic and (2) agreeing with some aspect of the criticism. When performed sincerely, these approaches can transform an actual or potentially negative climate into a more positive one.

Q: Using the scenario you identified in Objective 12.3, consider how the language of choice might have created a more invitational climate, and how nondefensive responses might have transformed the negative climate.

KEY TERMS

Acknowledgment (356)
Aggressiveness (360)
Argumentativeness (357)
Certainty (368)
Communication climate (354)
Complaining (357)
Confirming communication (355)
Controlling communication (364)
Description (363)
Disagreeing message (357)
Disconfirming communication (355)
Empathy (367)
Endorsement (357)
Equality (368)
Evaluation (363)
Face-threatening acts (361)
Invitational communication (370)
Neutrality (366)
Ostracism (360)
Problem orientation (364)
Provisionalism (368)
Recognition (356)
Spontaneity (365)
Strategy (365)
Superiority (367)

ACTIVITIES

1. Mental health experts generally find it is better to have others disagree with you than ignore you. With a partner or group of classmates, recall specific examples from personal experiences to illustrate this point. For these situations, devise ways of disagreeing without being disconfirming.

2. Gibb argues that spontaneous rather than strategic communication reduces defensiveness. However, in some situations a strategic approach may hold the promise of a better climate than a completely honest message. Consider situations such as these:

a. You don't find your partner very attractive. He or she asks, "What's the matter?"

b. You intend to quit your job because you hate your boss, but you don't want to offend him or her. How do you explain the reasons for your departure?

c. You are tutoring a high school student in reading or math. The student is sincere and a hard worker but is perhaps the most dull-witted person you have ever met. What do you say when the teenager asks, "How am I doing?"

3. In a group, construct sets of contrasting statements—one using the language of obligation, and the other restating the issue using the language of choice (see pages 371–372). Describe the difference each type of statement makes, both in terms of adjusting your attitude as a speaker and the receiver's likely reaction.

4. With a partner, practice your skill at responding nondefensively to critical attacks by following these steps:

a. Identify five criticisms you are likely to encounter from others in your day-to-day communication. If you have trouble thinking of criticisms, invite one or more people who know you well to supply some real, sincere gripes.

b. For each criticism, write one or more nondefensive responses using the alternatives on pages 372–377. Be sure your responses are sincere and that you can offer them without counterattacking your critic.

c. Practice your responses by having your partner play the role of your critics or by approaching your critics directly and inviting them to share their gripes with you.

SCORING FOR ASSESSING YOUR COMMUNICATION (PAGE 358)

Add your responses to the 7 items in Part I. This is your *confirmation* score: _____. The average score for college students was 29, with a possible range from 7 to 35. Higher scores represent greater confirmation.

Add your responses to the 10 items in Part II. This is your *disconfirmation* score: _____. The average score for college students was 20 (the original instrument has 17 items for this part), with a possible range from 10 to 50. Higher scores represent greater disconfirmation.

Note that confirmation and disconfirmation are independent. Although a friendship relationship is usually high in confirmation and low in disconfirmation, it may be high or low in either or both.

Glossary

Abstraction ladder A range of more-abstract to less-abstract terms describing an event or object. p. 149

Accommodation A lose-win conflict style in which one person defers to the other. p. 329

Achievement culture A culture that places a high value on the achievement of material success and a focus on the task at hand. Also termed "masculine" culture. p. 48

Acknowledgment A type of confirming message that communicates paying close attention to the ideas and feelings of others. p. 356

Advising (response) A listening response in which the receiver offers suggestions about how the speaker should deal with a problem. p. 219

Aggressiveness Verbal attacks that demean others' self-concept and inflict psychological pain. p. 360

Ambiguous language Language consisting of words and phrases that have more than one commonly accepted definition. p. 148

Analytical listening A style of listening that emphasizes hearing all details of a message and then assessing it from a variety of perspectives. p. 201

Analyzing (response) A listening response in which the listener offers an interpretation of a speaker's message. p. 218

Androgynous Possessing both masculine and feminine traits. p. 114

Argumentativeness Presenting and defending positions on issues while attacking positions taken by others. p. 357

Assertiveness Clearly and directly expressing one's thoughts, feelings, and wants to another person. p. 153

Asynchronous communication Communication that occurs when there is a time gap between when a message is sent and when it is received. p. 26

Attending A phase of the listening process in which the communicator focuses on a message, excluding other messages. p. 204

Attribution The process of attaching meaning to another person's behavior. p. 118

Avoidance A lose-lose conflict style in which people nonassertively ignore or stay away from conflict. p. 328

Avoiding A relational stage immediately prior to terminating in which the partners minimize contact with each other. p. 271

Benevolent lie A lie that is not considered malicious by the person who tells it. p. 95

Bonding A stage of relational development in which the partners make symbolic public gestures to show that their relationship exists. p. 270

Boundaries Limits that a family sets on its members' actions, such as what topics are permissible to discuss, how to discuss certain topics, and with whom family members may interact outside the family. p. 309

"But" statement A statement in which the second half cancels the meaning of the first; for example, "I'd like to help you, *but* I have to go or I'll miss my bus." p. 153

Certainty Dogmatically stating or implying that one's position is correct and others' ideas are not worth considering; likely to arouse defensiveness, according to Gibb. p. 368

Channel The medium through which a message passes from sender to receiver. p. 12

Chronemics The study of how people use and structure time. p. 187

Circumscribing A relational stage in which partners begin to reduce the scope of their contact and commitment to each other. p. 271

Closed questions Questions that limit the range of possible responses, such as questions that seek a yes-or-no answer. p. 209

Co-culture A group within an encompassing culture with a perceived identity. p. 39

Code-switching The practice of adapting one's manner of speaking when changing cultural or co-cultural contexts. p. 57

Cognitive complexity The ability to construct a variety of frameworks for viewing an issue. p. 22

Collaboration A win-win conflict style in which both people get what they want. p. 332

Collectivistic culture A culture whose members feel loyalties and obligations to an in-group, such as an extended family, a community, and even a work organization. p. 45

Communication The use of messages to generate meanings. p. 29

Communication climate The emotional tone of a relationship between two or more individuals. p. 354

Communication competence The ability to achieve one's goals in a manner that is, ideally, both effective and appropriate. p. 19

Comparison level (CL) The minimum standard of what behavior is acceptable from a relationship partner. p. 263

Comparison level of alternatives (CL_{alt}) A comparison between the rewards one is receiving in a present situation and those one could expect to receive in others. p. 264

Competition A win-lose conflict style in which one person wins at the other person's expense. p. 330

Complaining A disagreeing message that directly or indirectly communicates dissatisfaction with another person. p. 357

Complementary conflict When partners in a conflict use different but mutually reinforcing behaviors. p. 336

Compromise A conflict style in which both people get only part of what they want because they sacrifice some of their goals. p. 331

Confirmation bias The tendency to seek out and organize data that supports already existing opinions. p. 120

Confirming communication A message that expresses caring or respect for another person; the person is valued by the speaker. p. 355

Conflict An expressed struggle between at least two interdependent people who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from the other person in achieving their goals. p. 324

Conflict ritual Repeating pattern of interlocking conflict behaviors. p. 340

Conformity orientation The degree to which family communication stresses uniformity of attitudes, values, and beliefs. p. 305

Connection–autonomy dialectic The tension between the need for integration and the need for independence in a relationship. p. 274

Contempt Communication that demeans and belittles another person. One of Gottman's "Four Horsemen." p. 340

Content dimension The dimension of a message that communicates information about the subject being discussed. See *Relational dimension*. p. 14

Controlling communication According to Gibb, messages that attempt to impose some sort of outcome on another person, resulting in a defensive response. p. 364

Conventionality–uniqueness dialectic The tension between the need to behave in ways that conform to others' expectations and the need to assert one's individuality by behaving in ways that violate others' expectations. p. 276

Convergence The process of adapting one's speech style to match that of others with whom one wants to identify. See also *Divergence*. p. 142

Conversation orientation The degree to which families favor an open climate of discussion on a wide array of topics. p. 305

Counterfeit questions Questions that are disguised attempts to send a message rather than elicit information. p. 210

Critical listening A listening style that involves evaluating the content of a message. p. 201

Criticism Attacks on another person's character. One of Gottman's "Four Horsemen." p. 339

Culture The language, values, beliefs, traditions, and customs people share and learn. p. 38

Debilitative emotions Emotions of high intensity and long duration that prevent a person from functioning effectively. p. 244

De-escalatory spiral A reciprocal communication pattern in which one person's nonthreatening behavior leads to reduced hostility by the other, with the level of hostility steadily decreasing. Opposite of *Escalatory spiral*. p. 337

Defensiveness The attempt to protect a presenting image a person believes is being attacked. One of Gottman's "Four Horsemen." p. 339

Description Messages that describe a speaker's position without evaluating others. p. 363

Dialectical tensions Relational tensions that arise when two opposing or incompatible forces exist simultaneously. p. 273

Differentiating A relational stage in which the partners reestablish their individual identities after having bonded. p. 271

Direct aggression An expression of the sender's thoughts and/or feelings that attacks the position and dignity of the receiver. p. 331

Disagreeing message A message that essentially communicates to another person, "You are wrong," and includes argumentativeness and complaining. p. 357

Disconfirming communication A message that expresses a lack of caring or respect for another person; the person is not valued by the speaker. p. 355

Disfluencies Nonlinguistic verbalizations, for example, *um*, *er*, *uh*. p. 184

Disinhibition Expressing messages without considering the consequences of doing so; occurs more frequently in online communication. p. 30

Divergence Speaking in a way that emphasizes difference from others. See also *Convergence*. p. 143

Emblems Deliberate nonverbal behaviors with precise meanings, known to virtually all members of a cultural group. p. 171

Emotional contagion The process by which emotions are transferred from one person to another. p. 237

Emotional intelligence The ability to understand and manage one's own emotions and to be sensitive to others' feelings. p. 228

Emotional labor Managing and even suppressing emotions when it is both appropriate and necessary to do so. p. 235

Empathizing (response) A listening response that conveys identification with a speaker's perceptions and emotions. p. 214

Empathy The ability to project oneself into another person's point of view in an attempt to experience the other's thoughts and feelings. Also, a type of supportive communication described by Gibb. pp. 127, 367

Endorsement A type of confirming message that communicates agreement with and support for another person. p. 357

Environment Both the physical setting in which communication occurs and the personal perspectives of the people involved. p. 11

Equality A type of supportive communication described by Gibb, which suggests that the sender regards the receiver with respect. p. 368

Equivocation A statement that is not false but cleverly avoids an unpleasant truth. p. 96

Escalatory spiral A reciprocal communication pattern in which one person's attack leads to a counterattack by the other, with the level of hostility steadily increasing. Opposite of *De-escalatory spiral*. p. 337

Ethnicity A person's identification with a social group on the basis of common national or cultural traditions. p. 49

Ethnocentrism An attitude that one's own culture is superior to that of others. p. 62

Euphemism A pleasant term substituted for a blunt one to soften the impact of unpleasant information. p. 150

Evaluating (response) A listening response that appraises a sender's thoughts or behaviors and implies that the person evaluating is qualified to pass judgment on the other. p. 218

Evaluation A message in which a sender judges a receiver in some way, usually resulting in a defensive response. p. 363

Evaluative language Language that conveys the sender's attitude rather than simply offering an objective description. p. 152

Expectancy violation An instance when others don't behave as we assume they should. p. 299

Experimenting An early stage in relational development, consisting of a search for common ground. If the experimentation is successful, the relationship progresses to intensifying. If not, it may go no further. p. 267

Expression–privacy dialectic The tension between the desire to be open and disclosing and the desire to be closed and private. p. 276

Face The image an individual wants to project to the world. See also *Presenting self*. p. 78

Face-threatening acts Behavior by another that is perceived as attacking an individual's presenting image, or face. p. 361

Facework Actions people take to preserve their own and others' presenting images. p. 78

Facilitative emotions Emotions that contribute to effective functioning. p. 244

Fallacy of approval The irrational belief that it is vital to win the approval of virtually every person with whom a communicator interacts. p. 247

Fallacy of catastrophic expectations The irrational belief that the worst possible outcome will probably occur. p. 250

Fallacy of causation The irrational belief that emotions are caused by others and not by the person who has them. p. 249

Fallacy of helplessness The irrational belief that satisfaction in life is determined by forces beyond one's control. p. 250

Fallacy of overgeneralization Irrational beliefs in which (1) conclusions (usually negative) are based on limited evidence, or (2) communicators exaggerate their shortcomings. p. 249

Fallacy of perfection The irrational belief that a worthwhile communicator should be able to handle every situation with complete confidence and skill. p. 247

Fallacy of should The irrational belief that people should behave in the most desirable way, based on

the inability to distinguish between what *is* and what *should be*. p. 248

Family A system with two or more interdependent people who have a common past history and a present reality and who expect to influence each other in the future. p. 301

Family communication patterns Typical interaction processes in a family, identified by these categories: consensual, pluralistic, protective, or laissez-faire. See also *Conversation orientation; Conformity orientation*. p. 305

Feedback A discernable response of a receiver to a sender's message. p. 10

First-order realities The physically observable qualities of a thing or situation. p. 105

Friendship A voluntary interpersonal relationship that provides social support. p. 292

Fundamental attribution error The tendency to give more weight to personal qualities than to the situation when making attributions. p. 121

Gender The social and psychological dimensions of masculine and feminine behavior. p. 113

Halo effect The tendency to form an overall positive impression of a person on the basis of one positive characteristic. See also *Horns effect*. p. 120

Haptics The study of touch in human communication. p. 181

Hearing The first stage in the listening process in which sound waves are received by a communicator. p. 198

High-context culture A culture that relies heavily on subtle, often nonverbal cues to maintain social harmony. p. 43

Horns effect The tendency to form an overall negative impression of a person on the basis of one negative characteristic. See also *Halo effect*. p. 120

Hyperpersonal communication An acceleration of the discussion of personal topics and relational development; occurs more frequently in online communication. p. 26

"I" language Language that uses first-person singular pronouns to identify the source of the message and to take responsibility. See also *"You" language*. p. 152

Impression management The communication strategies people use to influence how others view them. p. 77

Inclusion–seclusion dialectic The tension between a couple's desire for involvement with the "outside world" and their desire to live their own lives, free of what can feel like interference from others. p. 275

Individualistic culture A culture in which people view their primary responsibility as helping themselves personally rather than looking out for the needs of the larger group. p. 44

In-group A group with which an individual identifies. p. 39

Initiating The first stage in relational development in which the interactants express interest in one another. p. 267

Integrating A relational stage in which the interactants begin to take on a single identity. p. 269

Integration–separation dialectic The tension between the desire for connection with others and the desire for independence. p. 273

Intensifying A relational stage following experimenting in which the interactants move toward integration by increasing their amount of contact and the breadth and depth of their self-disclosure. p. 268

Intercultural communication Communication that occurs when members of two or more cultures or other groups exchange messages in a manner that is influenced by their different cultural perceptions and symbol systems. p. 40

Interpersonal communication In contrast to *impersonal* communication, the interpersonal variety is distinguished by the qualities of uniqueness, interdependence, self-disclosure, and intrinsic rewards. p. 15

Interpretation The process of attaching meaning to sense data. p. 107

Intersectionality The notion that culture is multidimensional, and therefore no single label can fully explain an individual's identity and group memberships. p. 49

Intimate distance One of Hall's four distance zones, ranging from skin contact to 18 inches. p. 185

Invitational communication An approach that welcomes others to see your point of view and to freely share their own. p. 370

"It" statements A statement in which "it" replaces the personal pronoun "I," making the statement less direct and more evasive. p. 152

Johari Window A model that describes the relationship between self-disclosure and self-awareness. p. 87

Kinesics The study of body movements. p. 178

Leanness A description of messages that carry less information due to a lack of nonverbal cues. See also *Richness*. p. 25

Lie A deliberate attempt to hide or misrepresent the truth. p. 95

Linguistic relativity The notion that the language individuals use exerts a strong influence on their perceptions. p. 139

Listening The process of receiving and responding to others' messages. p. 197

Listening fidelity The degree of congruence between what a listener understands and what the message-sender was attempting to communicate. p. 206

Love languages Methods of expressing affection to a romantic partner, such as words of affirmation, quality time, gifts, acts of service, and physical touch. p. 316

Low-context culture A culture that primarily uses language (rather than nonverbal cues) to express thoughts, feelings, and ideas as clearly and directly as possible. p. 43

Masspersonal communication Interaction that crosses boundaries between mass and interpersonal contexts. p. 17

Mediated communication Sending messages via technological channels such as phones, email, and the internet. p. 12

Metacommunication Messages (usually relational) that refer to other messages; communication about communication. p. 279

Mindful listening Careful and thoughtful attention and responses to others' messages. p. 198

Mindless listening Reacting to others' messages automatically and routinely, without much mental involvement. p. 198

Monochronic An approach to the management of time that emphasizes punctuality, schedules, and completing one task at a time. p. 187

Multimodality The ability and willingness to use multiple channels of communication. p. 32

Narratives The stories we use to describe our personal worlds. p. 109

Negotiation The fourth stage of the perception process, in which communicators influence each other's perception through interaction. p. 108

Neutrality A defense-arousing behavior described by Gibb in which the sender expresses indifference toward a receiver. p. 366

Noise External, physiological, and psychological distractions that interfere with the accurate transmission and reception of a message. p. 11

Nonverbal communication Messages expressed by nonlinguistic means. p. 166

Nurturing culture A culture that regards the support of relationships as an especially important goal. Also termed "feminine" culture. p. 48

Oculesics The study of how the eyes can communicate. p. 179

Openness–closedness dialectic The tension between the desire to be honest and open and the desire for privacy. p. 276

Open questions Questions that allow for a variety of extended responses. p. 209

Organization The stage in the perception process that involves arranging data in a meaningful way to make sense of the world. p. 106

Ostracism Intentionally excluding others from social interaction. p. 360

Out-group A group that an individual sees as different from herself or himself. p. 39

Paralanguage Nonlinguistic means of vocal expression, for example, rate, pitch, and tone. p. 182

Paraphrasing Restating a speaker's thoughts and feelings in the listener's own words. p. 211

Passive aggression An indirect expression of aggression, delivered in a way that allows the sender to maintain a facade of kindness. p. 330

Perceived self The person we believe ourselves to be in moments of candor. It may be identical to or different from the presenting and desired selves. p. 78

Perception checking A three-part method for verifying the accuracy of interpretations, including a description of the sense data, two possible interpretations, and a request for confirmation of the interpretations. p. 125

Personal distance One of Hall's four distance zones, ranging from 18 inches to 4 feet. p. 185

Personal space The distance we put between ourselves and others. p. 185

Phonological rules Rules governing the way in which sounds are pronounced in a language. p. 137

Politeness Communicating in ways that save face for both senders and receivers. p. 144

Polychronic An approach to the management of time that emphasizes flexibility of schedules and pursuing multiple tasks at the same time. p. 187

Power distance The degree to which members of a society accept an unequal distribution of power among members. p. 46

Powerful language Direct and forceful word choices, with declarations and assertions. p. 143

Powerless language Forms of speech that communicate to others a lack of power in the speaker: hedges, hesitations, intensifiers, and so on. p. 143

Pragmatic rules Rules that govern interpretation of language in terms of its social context. See also *Semantic rules; Syntactic rules*. p. 138

Predictability–novelty dialectic Within a relationship, the tension between the need for a predictable relational partner and one who is more spontaneous and less predictable. p. 275

Prejudice An unfairly biased and intolerant attitude toward others who belong to an out-group. p. 62

Presenting self The image a person presents to others. It may be identical to or different from the perceived and desired selves. p. 78

Primacy effect The tendency to pay more attention to, and to better recall, things that happen first in a sequence. p. 120

Privacy management The choices people make to reveal or conceal information about themselves. p. 88

Problem orientation A supportive style of communication described by Gibb in which the communicators focus on working together to solve their problems instead of trying to impose their own solutions on one another. p. 364

Provisionalism A supportive style of communication described by Gibb in which a sender expresses open-mindedness to others' ideas and opinions. p. 368

Proxemics The study of how communication is affected by the use, organization, and perception of space and distance. p. 184

Public distance One of Hall's four distance zones, extending outward from 12 feet. p. 186

Punctuation The process of determining the causal order of events in a series of interactions. p. 107

Questioning (response) A listening response in which the receiver seeks additional information from the sender. p. 209

Race A social category originally created to explain differences between people whose ancestors originated in different regions of the world. p. 48

Racist language Language that classifies members of one racial group as superior and others as inferior. p. 147

Reappraisal Rethinking the meaning of emotionally charged events in ways that alter their emotional impact. p. 231

Recognition A type of confirming message that communicates awareness of another person. p. 356

Reference groups Groups against which we compare ourselves, thereby influencing our self-concept and self-esteem. p. 72

Reflected appraisal A mirroring of the judgments of other people; part of how the self-concept develops. p. 72

Regulators Nonverbal cues that help control verbal interaction. p. 173

Relational commitment A promise, explicit or implied, to remain in a relationship and to make that relationship successful. p. 313

Relational dimension The dimension of a message that expresses the social relationship between two or more individuals. See *Content dimension*. p. 14

Relational listening A listening style that is primarily concerned with emotionally connecting with others. p. 199

Relational maintenance Communication aimed at keeping relationships operating smoothly and satisfactorily. p. 266

Relational transgression A violation of the explicit or implicit terms of a relationship, letting the partner down in some important way. p. 284

Relative language Words that gain their meaning by comparison. p. 151

Remembering A phase of the listening process in which a message is recalled. p. 206

Responding A phase of the listening process in which feedback occurs, offering evidence that the message has been received. p. 206

Revelation–concealment dialectic The tension between a couple's desire to be open and honest with the "outside world" and their desire to keep things to themselves. p. 277

Richness The quantity of nonverbal cues that accompany spoken messages. See also *Leanness*. p. 25

Rumination Recurrent thoughts not demanded by the immediate environment that increase an emotion's duration. p. 244

Salience The significance attached to a particular person or phenomenon. p. 41

Sapir–Whorf hypothesis The best-known declaration of linguistic relativism, based on the work of Benjamin Whorf and Edward Sapir. p. 139

Second-order realities Perceptions that arise from attaching meaning to first-order things or situations. See *First-order realities*. p. 105

Selection A phase of the perception process in which a communicator attends to a stimulus from the environment. p. 106

Self-concept The relatively stable set of perceptions each individual holds of herself or himself. See also *Self-esteem*. p. 70

Self-disclosure The process of deliberately revealing information about oneself that is significant and that would not normally be known by others. p. 86

Self-esteem Evaluations of self-worth; how one feels about one's self-concept. See *Self-concept*. p. 70

Self-fulfilling prophecy The causal relationship that occurs when a person's expectations of an event and her or his subsequent behavior based on those expectations make the outcome more likely to occur than would otherwise have been true. p. 76

Self-monitoring The process of attending to one's behavior and using these observations to shape the way one behaves. p. 23

Self-serving bias The tendency to judge oneself in the most generous terms possible while being more critical of others. p. 121

Self-talk The nonvocal, internal monologue that is our process of thinking. p. 246

Semantic rules Rules that govern the meaning of language, as opposed to its structure. See *Syntactic rules; Pragmatic rules*. p. 138

Serial argument Repetitive conflicts about the same issue. p. 338

Sexist language Words, phrases, and expressions that unnecessarily differentiate between females and males or exclude, trivialize, or diminish on the basis of one's sex. p. 145

Significant other A person whose opinion is important enough to affect one's self-concept strongly. p. 72

Silent listening Staying attentive and nonverbally responsive without offering verbal feedback. p. 208

Sincere questions Genuine attempts to elicit information from others. p. 210

Social comparison Evaluating oneself in terms of or by comparison to others. p. 72

Social distance One of Hall's four distance zones, ranging from 4 to 12 feet. p. 186

Social exchange theory An economic model of relational attraction that suggests we seek out people who can give us rewards that are greater than or equal to the costs we encounter in dealing with them. p. 262

Social identity The part of the self-concept that is based on membership in groups. p. 39

Social media A term that describes all the communication channels that allow community-based input, interaction, content-sharing, and collaboration. Defined broadly, this includes (but isn't limited to) text messaging, Twitter, email, instant messaging, and social networking services. p. 23

Social penetration model A model that describes relationships in terms of their breadth and depth. p. 86

Social support Helping others during challenging times by providing emotional, informational, or instrumental resources. p. 283

Spontaneity A supportive communication behavior described by Gibb in which the sender expresses a message without any attempt to manipulate the receiver. p. 365

Stability–change dialectic The tension between the desire to keep a relationship predictable and stable and the desire for novelty and change. p. 275

Stagnating A relational stage characterized by declining enthusiasm and standardized forms of behavior. p. 271

Standpoint theory A body of scholarship that explores how one's position in a society shapes one's view of society in general and of specific individuals. p. 113

Stereotyping Exaggerated beliefs associated with a categorizing system. p. 119

Stonewalling Withdrawing from and shutting down interaction with another person. One of Gottman's "Four Horsemen." p. 340

Strategy A defense-arousing style of communication described by Gibb in which a sender tries to manipulate or deceive a receiver. p. 365

Superiority A defense-arousing style of communication described by Gibb in which the sender states or implies that the receiver is inferior. p. 367

Supporting (response) A listening response in which the receiver reveals her or his solidarity with the speaker's situation. p. 216

Symmetrical conflict Partners in a conflict use the same tactics. p. 337

Synchronous communication Communication that occurs in real time. p. 26

Syntactic rules Rules that govern the ways symbols can be arranged, as opposed to the meanings of those symbols. See *Semantic rules; Pragmatic rules*. p. 137

System A group, such as a family, whose members interact with one another to form a whole. p. 304

Task-oriented listening A listening style that is primarily concerned with efficiency. p. 199

Terminating The concluding state of a relationship, characterized by the acknowledgment of one or both partners that the relationship is over. p. 272

Territory A stationary area claimed by a person or animal. p. 187

Transactional communication The dynamic process in which communicators create meaning together through interaction. p. 10

Triangular theory of love The notion that love comprises three interacting components: intimacy, passion, and commitment. p. 312

Uncertainty avoidance The tendency of a culture's members to feel threatened by ambiguous situations, and how much they try to avoid them. p. 47

Understanding A stage in the listening process in which the receiver attaches meaning to a message. p. 205

"We" language The use of first-person-plural pronouns to include others, either appropriately or inappropriately. See *"I" language; "You" language*. p. 154

Win-win problem solving An approach to conflict resolution in which people work together to satisfy all their goals. p. 332

"You" language A statement that expresses or implies a judgment of the other person. See *Evaluation; "I" language*. p. 153

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